

READER

Recipes for restaurant survival

From heated yurts to community support, local eateries are doing what they can to make it through the pandemic's bleakest months yet.

By EMMA OXNEVAD | 8

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THIS WEEK ON CHICAGOREADER.COM



CHRIS STRONG

Twenty-four points of view on the band Joan of Arc

Tim Kinsella lets everyone else tell the story of his longest-running group—entirely in keeping with their music's embrace of illogic and reinvention.

By LEOR GALIL

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CITY LIFE



Tessa Vierk hands off power tools to Chicago Tool Library customer.

TRAN TRAN

SHOP LOCAL

Lending a hand

Chicago Tool Library has proven to be a much-needed lifeline for locals sprucing up spaces while quarantining.

By JENNA RIMENSNYDER

Pandemic home remodeling provides a productive way to cope with quarantining and isolation. From fresh coats of paint to reenvisioned bedrooms, Chicagoans are getting crafty to stay sane indoors. While many have big dreams of modeling their kitchen like *Friends*' Monica Geller (complete with a yellow frame around the peephole), many of us don't have the budget to invest in the necessary power tools to get the job done.

That's where Chicago Tool Library (CTL) comes in clutch. The nonprofit made its debut at 1038 W. 37th, Suite 102, in August 2019—just months before the arrival of COVID-19. Cofounders Tessa Vierk and Jim Benton cre-

ated this space as a hub for the community to borrow tools for up to seven days at a time. Think of the CTL like a public library, but instead of books, the shelves are stocked with power tools and miscellaneous appliances you can check out for projects.

"Over 90 percent of our inventory has been donated by community members, so if folks have tools or equipment hiding in their garages or closets they can donate them to us," Vierk says. "Our current list of accepted items is here and it's a great way for people to give their items a chance at a second life and help their neighbors accomplish their tasks."

The concept offers a sliding scale membership program making it easy for anybody to sign up, regardless of income.

"Membership fees cover the entire year, and it can cost whatever they want," Vierk explains. "[Members] can pay \$350 or \$3 for the year, it depends on what works for them."

Once your membership is in order, you don't have to sweat rental fees per item or late fees. Vierk and Benton are keeping it simple. This method has proved to be invaluable to locals who were looking to revamp spaces during

quarantine.

"We've never been busier," Vierk says. "We saw a lot of new visitors. Even after being closed for a month at the beginning of COVID, we still managed to have about 1,300 visitors."

Just to give you an idea of the impact, the Chicago Tool Library's members are from 80 percent of Chicago's zip codes. Damn, that's a lot of do-it-yourselfers, which can be a little tricky when a pandemic works its way into the mix.

When the virus first hit, Chicago Tool Library sprang into action in order to put some safety protocols in place for both members and volunteers. The CTL team built software for the library inventory.

"As a COVID response, we added a new login feature that includes tool reservation and schedulings for pickups and drop-offs," Vierk says.

This means no in-person browsing of the library, but don't stress it; the CTL team is working hard to keep the inventory on the site as up to date as possible. Once an item is reserved, members can head over to CTL's service window for pickup.

While tool usage is seasonal, Vierk says that a major trend for members over the last year was checking out sewing machines to create face masks. The cofounder also says that the nonprofit's kitchen section was a hit in 2020, allowing locals access to nontraditional appliances like tortilla presses, food dehydrators, and ice cream machines.

"We have a broad definition of what makes a 'tool' and our library includes lots of items that the average Chicagoan might want to access, but not own because it is either too expensive, too bulky, or too rarely used for folks to want to purchase or own it," Vierk says. "Access over ownership is the point of libraries—it's more environmentally and financially sensible and it builds community."

If you want to get involved with Chicago Tool Library as a handy volunteer, Vierk asks you to hold off until the pandemic subsides. But if you're itching to be part of the team, there may be some remote opportunities available. Check out chicagotoollibrary.org/volunteering.

@j_rimensnyder

A long, ornate hallway with a patterned rug, framed pictures on the walls, and a wooden cabinet on the right. The hallway leads to a bright, open area at the end.

\$850,000

A bright, modern living room with a large grey sectional sofa, a white fireplace with a mantel, a large window with a view of a garden, and a ceiling fan.

\$729,000

A bright, modern living room with a large arched doorway. On the left, a wooden bench sits against a wall with a large framed painting. The room features light-colored wooden flooring and a patterned sofa in the background.

\$695,000

\$675.000

A modern dining room with a dark wood table and white chairs. Large arched windows with orange frames are visible in the background, and a vase of white flowers sits on the table.

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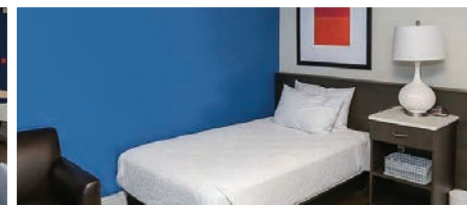


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RESTAURANT REVIEW

Aye-Aye, Kapitan

The owners of Serai open the country's only nyonya restaurant, devoted to the food of Malaysia's Peranakan culture.

By **MIKE SULA**

Yes, the pandemic has been devastating for restaurants in Chicago, but for some reason it's been a very good time for the food of the Malay Archipelago, encompassing the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and more; and by extension, that's good for everyone. (The awful demise of Lincoln Park's Rickshaw Republic notwithstanding.)

Filipino food has long been strongly represented in Chicago, but it surged in the time of COVID-19, with pop-ups such as pig & fire, Luzviminda, and Adobo Loko. And even though they've been sparsely represented historically, so have Malaysian and Indonesian cuisine. In the Before it was limited to Arlington Heights stalwart Penang, Chris and Priscilla Reed's Indo-Cajun Bumbu Roux (formerly the Rice Table), Logan Square's Malaysian Serai, and more recently the Bingo Tea minichain.

But 2020 saw the rise of nimble Instagram pop-ups with the freedom to explore specific expressions of Malaysian and Indonesian

foods, like the vegan Ku Rasa, the regional research of the husband-and-wife duo behind Kedai Tapao, and Minahasa's deep dive into North Sulawesi food (now ensconced at Politan Row).

But the most audacious and exciting development by far was the December opening of Kapitan, a 5,000-square-foot Lincoln Park brick-and-mortar by the folks behind Serai. When owner Victor Low opened the latter five years ago it was a godsend, specializing in a generalized expression of Malaysian street food that nonetheless tried to lead the uncomfortable or unfamiliar along, with hand-holders like General Tso's Chicken and pad thai.

But three years ago Low took issue with a passing comment from a customer that Malaysian food would never overcome its association with cheap street food. On a trip back home to Kuala Lumpur, he dined in a Peranakan restaurant serving the food of the Chinese merchant diaspora that spread and

intermarried across the islands beginning in the 1400s. Over the centuries a sophisticated cuisine developed, employing Chinese cooking methods with local ingredients.

The culture is famously represented in the movie *Crazy Rich Asians* and the Netflix series *The Ghost Bride*, both of which feature Peranakan food. Also known as nyonya cuisine (a term referring to the women who originally cooked it), prominent cameos included show-stoppers like chili crab and Hainanese chicken, late-night noodle fixes like Hokkien fried mee and laksa lemak, the civilized breakfast ritual of kaya toast and Kopi-O coffee roasted with black sugar and margarine, and the galaxy of bite-sized sweets known as kuih.

"We started thinking, 'Why isn't there a true Peranakan restaurant in the U.S.?' " says Low, noting that Malaysian restaurants in the states feature Peranakan dishes here and there, but none are fully dedicated to it. "We realized the potential to educate people to the heritage."

Low leased the space nearly a year before the first COVID-19 lockdown, but the opening was first delayed by construction issues. During the first months of the pandemic, he kept busy keeping Serai going, instituting lunch service, offering free food to those in need, and not laying off a single employee. But the opening of Kapitan was never in doubt. Low is looking forward to dine-in restrictions going away—the space is large and features tall windows that open onto Clybourn Avenue—and currently he's offering private dining for single groups. He definitely isn't banking on it, however, instead investing his energies into robust carryout capability that preserves the integrity of the dishes, with some assembly required.

Kapitan is open for three squares, notably with distinctly Malaysian breakfast options and smaller, snackier dim-sum-type bites. But the real scope and ambition of the operation is evident in one key category: though Low's Penang-born chef, Khoo Lew, previously cooked in a handful of suburban Chicago Chinese restaurants, he's of Peranakan heritage and has taken it upon himself to build a repertoire of some 30 kuih, about two each day made in small batches that Low says sell out regularly. These include kuih talam, a double-layered cake of coconut and vivid-green pandan jellies; onde-onde, glutinous rice balls rolled in salted coconut and loaded with an explosion of liquid palm sugar; pulut tai-tai,

a glutinous rice cake laced blue with butterfly pea flower, and topped with the coconut-egg custard kaya; and the storied "red tortoise cake," ang ju kuih.

Kapitan dabbles in a few non-Peranakan items like the ubiquitous street-cart, omelet-encased Ramly burger seasoned with Maggi and black pepper sauce, as well as notable Muslim dishes like roti and the eggy, beef-stuffed pancake murtabak, each served with a potato-mung bean dal for dredging.

But the majority of the menu is nyonya-focused, as with the dainty pie tee, delicate pastry shells stuffed with carrot, daikon, and jicama slaw, each crowned with a snappy shrimp; or babi pongteh, thick slabs of quivering pork belly and potato cooked with fermented soybean, meant to be sandwiched in steamed buns and a bit sweeter than its Taiwanese counterpart. A variant of Hainanese chicken is served as a whole-roasted bird, while chillied shell-on prawns stand in for the whole crab featured in the storied Singaporean dish. Turmeric coconut rice plates, nasi kuning, are accompanied by one of two chicken curry options; the saucy, milder ayam kapitan and the hotter, dryer gulai ayam stand out among heavier meatier entrées.

The Peranakan version of laksa lemak is a milder curried, coconut-intensive version of the substantial portion at Serai, and though it's meant to be eaten in multiple tiny bowls it's still an impressive specimen, loaded with chicken, shrimp, fish balls, and slippery lai fun noodles. Most of the standard, iconic Malaysian noodle dishes are present, from the breakfast vermicelli mee siam, to the tubular chee cheong fun. But the housemade dry pan mee are extraordinary: flat, snappy, hand-pulled noodles bathing in a rich, soy-spiked anchovy broth, a rowdily textured bowl with fish balls, hard-cooked eggs, and Chinese broccoli.

Low says Kapitan is one of only two restaurants in the U.S. serving the strong, black, margarine-and-sugar caramelized Kopi-O coffee (the other is in New York), and he's promising many more singularities in the months ahead, particularly the spiced chicken dish ayam buah keluak, which employs the notorious poisonous-until-cooked seeds of the kepayang tree.

"We will stretch over time," he says. "They have over 150 different dishes. The Peranakan cuisine is so huge we couldn't put everything on there."

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WRITTEN BY JENNA RIMENSNYDER



MARIE CHESLIK, DANIELLE NORRIS, AND KYLA PEAL
Slik Wines

To the casual wine drinker, understanding the finer details during a tasting can seem overwhelming. That's where Slik Wines comes in. Cofounders and certified sommeliers Marie Cheslik, Danielle Norris, and Kyla Peal wanted to create a platform to act as a liaison between winemakers and the people who drink it.

With a combined 40+ years of experience in restaurants, the trio understands the intricacies of the niche wine industry and are on a mission to demystify the conversation surrounding the industry. Clients can range from the novice wine drinker who wants to host a virtual blind tasting for friends or a business happy hour to wine and beverage programs and cellars in need of consulting.

Cultivated in August 2020, during the height of the pandemic, Slik's business plan is focused on sustainability, with safety protocols baked in from marketing aspects to hosting events. The three leading ladies plan to continue with these practices long after we shed COVID-19, allowing them to consistently offer safe and accessible ways to connect with clients. While gathering in intimate spaces isn't on the agenda, the Slik trio is hosting virtual events as well as a handful of in-person get-togethers in open-air venues for small groups, covering the ins and outs of wine as well as hospitality. In the future, Slik hopes to offer larger events, widening the brand's reach and growing its wine gang.

Speaking of Wine Gang, that's the name of Slik's monthly wine club. The mascot is Cheslik's moped, Zelda. If it isn't obvious, Slik is all about authenticity and creating inclusion for all levels in a new and exciting way. The wonder women of wine want to create a community in times of quarantine, while showing members the ropes when it comes to wine education. Club membership includes two hand-picked wines delivered to your door (or for pickup) as well as access to a short video, made by one of the three cofounders, detailing the wine's backstory and optimal pairing suggestions.

This side hustle for Cheslik, Norris, and Peal continues to evolve and prove to be a necessary lifeline for both wine enthusiasts and professionals in Chicagoland and potentially beyond. In the meantime, Slik is spreading the love of wine one gang member at a time.

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DINING OUT

Recipes for restaurant survival

From heated yurts to community support, local eateries are doing what they can to make it through the pandemic's bleakest months yet.

By **EMMA OXNEVAD**

Irma Enriquez, owner and operator of Humboldt Park restaurant La Encantada, is hoping for a better year.

Enriquez, who runs the restaurant without any full-time staff, is one of the countless local business owners negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, despite having outdoor seating available for customers.

While able to survive off of other means of income—like renting a out room above the

restaurant and funds from the Small Business Administration disaster assistance program—La Encantada has struggled to make ends meet throughout the pandemic.

“I haven’t been busy and sometimes I don’t sell anything,” Enriquez says.

The financial blow has been so severe that Enriquez changed La Encantada’s business number to her personal cell phone number to cut back costs on paying multiple phone bills.

“I’m just waiting to the summer, in summer it will pick up a little bit,” she says.

Enriquez’s struggles are indicative of a larger plight faced by restaurant owners throughout Chicago, where COVID-19 is still very much a reality. While the pandemic persists, businesses are adopting new methods to stay afloat.

Even for a veteran restauranter like Uptown’s Baton Show Lounge owner Jim Flint—who boasts more than 50 years in the industry—2020 proved to be a landmark year in terms of economic hardship.

“I never thought I’d go through anything like that in my lifetime, and I’m 79 years old,” he says. “I never thought I would experience something like this last year.”

Prior to the reintroduction of indoor dining in late January, dine-in establishments faced

the challenge of seating customers in a way that both complied with the city’s COVID mitigations and protected customers from the harsh Chicago winter. While indoor dining has recently made a comeback in Chicago, these unique dining methods remain implemented.

Open Outcry Brewing Company, located in Beverly, has implemented four heated outdoor domes that seat up to six guests. The domes cost only \$1 to rent per reservation and are designed to keep distance between separate parties.

“They’re probably more conservative than sitting in other outdoor dining options that other bars and restaurants across the country have been forced to do [like] setting up tents outdoors that is basically an indoor dining scenario,” says owner John Brand. “These are structures that single parties are in by

Baton Show Lounge owner Jim Flint has not seen anything like the economic hardship of 2020 in his 50 years in the restaurant industry.

JEFF MARINI

themselves.”

Across town, Fulton Market steakhouse Swift & Sons has similarly implemented adaptations to its dining options, most notably through the use of a “yurt village,” where customers can dine in heated tents themed by decade.

The yurt village is the result of a partnership between American Express and Resy, wherein 13 high-end restaurants throughout the country were chosen to receive the luxury heated tents.

At Swift & Sons, the yurts are available by reservation only, where up to six guests can enjoy a “five-course prix fixe menu” to the tune of \$85 a person, not including gratuity or beverage taxes. Despite the high price tag, general manager Wesley Conger says customers have been “ecstatic” about the yurt village.

“We’re sold out pretty much every weekend at this point,” she says. “It’s really the perfect escape from the cold and from COVID, I would say.”

But even with high price points and constant traffic, the restaurant has seen wildly diminished numbers when compared to pre-pandemic revenue.

“We were a restaurant that could do \$50,000-\$60,000 on any given night [prior to the pandemic] and then when we reopened, there were nights when we did like \$9,000,” Conger says. “So that was pretty much a big blow for us. That was a lot of like when we were just doing takeout. Now that we are open for the patio and the yurts and a portion indoors, our numbers are definitely getting better. People definitely want to be going out and are tired of sitting at home.”

While heated domes and other modifications to outdoor dining have proven successful for businesses with an adequate amount of both space and resources, the new model is not without its setbacks. For Mindy Friedler, co-owner of both Jerry’s Sandwiches and Fiya, the outdoor bubbles found at both locations add a new element of upkeep.

“You can’t really leave [the domes] up if the weather is very bad,” she says. “At Jerry’s we take them up and down every night, because they’re right on the public square. And we were worried about vandalism and theft.”

Indoor dining being reimplemented in the

city—with a 25 percent capacity limit—came shortly after news of a new, more contagious variant of the virus, believed to have already hit Chicago. While persisting cases and a largely infectious variant can reasonably inspire hesitation where indoor dining is concerned, many businesses cannot afford to close their doors to customers.

“[Indoor dining reopening is] a morale boost, for both myself and the staff here, for sure,” Brand says. “What I’ve seen, is for the most part—and there’s exceptions—but for

older customers, and they come in there with their masks on and their gloves on,” she says. “Most of them are still insecure about coming in to sit down, but they’ll come in, get their coffee, get their food, and go . . . If they don’t have masks on, I don’t let them in.”

For Enriquez, the prospect of reopening for indoor dining was one she eagerly readied herself for. Despite having her doors open the first weekend of newly reimplemented indoor dining, Enriquez did not seat a single customer on her first day.

“We have to continue to try to work very hard, very diligently. And I know that we will get past this and how we learn from this and grow from this.” —Robert Adams Jr., Honey 1 BBQ

the most part, everybody’s taking [COVID mitigations] as seriously as they can. Not only for contributing to the well-being of our fellow citizens but to keep your business alive.”

Sara Phillips, owner of Chef Sara’s Cafe in South Shore, opened the doors of her business to indoor dining, despite her own fears regarding COVID; Phillips was previously operating on a pick-up and delivery model because the restaurant is in an area where she couldn’t have outdoor dining. She says that she trusts that her customers know how to keep themselves—and others—safe.

“I’m just a small area in a small community, and most of our people are aware of what they have to do to stay safe because I have a lot of

“It is sad, but I’m still here,” she says.

When asked why no customers showed, Enriquez remarked that many of her regular customers are taking the pandemic seriously, with poor winter weather also being a factor.

While the beginning of the year is often understood as being a slow period for restaurants, operating under a pandemic for 11 months has amplified any potential struggles faced by businesses. Robert Adams Jr., of pick-up spot Honey 1 BBQ in Bronzeville, says that the ability to go out to eat is a luxury many can’t afford, given the economic fallout of the pandemic. That, compounded with the traditional pledge to eat healthier in the new year, can also serve as a detriment to businesses.

“January is always a slow part of the season, and February,” he says. “It’s cold. People are restructuring their living and funds available. . . . So, with new years, there’s always new endeavors. And also, it’s just, you got to kind of be prepared for it as much as you can.”

Still, he remains optimistic. “We have to continue to try to work very hard, very diligently,” Adams says. “And I know that we will get past this and how we learn from this and grow from this . . . There will be light at the end of the tunnel.”

Phillips says that while she hopes business picks up in spite of the slow season, her business has been greatly helped by the generosity of her community.

“I’ll have a customer come in, they’re glad to see us, and then they’ll put like a \$100 tip on my tablet,” she says. “And these people have tipped us pretty nice on the tablet, or they’ll put it in the tip jar. And then I had a minister come in at the very beginning of COVID and asked me about how we had fallen off with the business as far as employees, was I making enough to pay my bills and everything, and the church paid my expenses for two months.”

While Friedler admits that she considered placing Fiya on hiatus during the pandemic, she ultimately decided against it out of a desire to keep her staff employed. She says she has been “pleasantly surprised” by how the restaurant is faring amid the pandemic.

“I don’t mean to make it all sound rosy, it is by no means ideal, but it’s not as awful as we thought it would be,” she says.

When reflecting on the hardships brought on by 2020, business owners have remarked that the lessons learned from the previous year have largely been born by negative experiences.

“[COVID] taught me how to lay off people which I never had to do,” Flint says. “Second, it taught me how to really cut down and watch everything that you’re doing, so you don’t waste anything and you don’t spend money that you don’t need to, because you don’t have it. So you really take more of an interest in every little penny that you have.”

Moving forward, he is hoping that the new year brings something better for both his business and his staff.

For Enriquez, her hopes for the new year are even simpler.

“My hope is [to] get the vaccine,” she says. “Eventually, everything is going [back to] normal.” **FI**

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NEWS & POLITICS



Confession time: I'm having trouble conjuring up any outrage over Steans (left) handing off her state senate seat to Cassidy.

LENI MANAA-HOPPENWORTH

POLITICS

So outrageous

Why it's hard to get outraged about the Steans-to-Cassidy handoff

By BEN JORAVSKY

Folks, I have a confession that I'm a little embarrassed to make . . .

I'm not as outraged as I should be about the handoff that's about to go down in the seventh senatorial district on the north side of Chicago.

That's the one in which—follow me—state senator Heather Steans has stepped down and Democratic committeepeople seem prepared to fill her vacancy with state representative Kelly Cassidy.

And Cassidy is one of those committeepeople voting to fill the vacancy. That's what you would call bad optics, even for Chicago.

I know I should be more outraged because Democratic committeepeople filling legislative vacancies is one of the many outrageous things about Chicago politics that we're supposed to feel outraged about.

So, yes, I realize I'm supposed to express

outrage. And if I were to go on a WBEZ public affairs show, I'd say—"Oh, my God, I'm outraged!"

But just so you know, deep down inside . . . I'm not that outraged.

I have many reasons for a lack of outrage, starting with . . .

Kelly Cassidy's one of my favorites, having won me over years ago with her priapism bill back in 2012. Plus, she's probably one of the few elected officials who's almost as far to the left as I am.

OK, well, along with state senator Robert Peters. Who, now that I think about it, was also originally appointed to his seat.

Another reason I'm not so outraged is that there are so many other outrageous things to be more outraged about. Like . . .

Mary Miller—a Republican congresswoman from downstate—thinks it's OK to say "Hitler

was right." She said it in a speech she made a few weeks ago. And I'm still not over it.

As outrageous as that is, Miller's not even the most outrageous Republican congresswoman in Washington.

That dubious honor probably falls to Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Republican representative from Georgia. Among Taylor Greene's more outrageous behavior is that she sort of endorsed the execution of House speaker Nancy Pelosi, said the Parkland massacre was staged, stalked David Hogg (a survivor of that massacre), and apparently believes that forest fires in California were caused by a laser beam fired from space by Jewish bankers.

That's pretty outrageous.

But that's not even the most outrageous part of the Marjorie Taylor Greene saga. No, that would be the fact that, aside from Congressman Adam Kinzinger, few Republicans have called on her to step down.

They're as silent on Greene as they were on Mary Miller.

But they're really outraged about Heather Steans handing off her seat to Kelly Cassidy. In fact, the *Tribune* wrote an editorial denouncing it.

Not sure why *Tribune* editorial writers didn't denounce Mary Miller or Taylor Greene. Who knows—maybe they agree with them.

Now, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, *Ben, if the Tribune is for something, you're automatically against it.*

I'm outraged that you'd think that! Though it's not without some truth.

I will take this opportunity to point out that the *Tribune* is curiously selective on issues of legislative appointees. For instance . . .

In November 2019, former state representative Luis Arroyo stepped down after he was indicted for allegedly bribing another politician.

Arroyo then used his votes as Democratic committeeman to help select his legislative successor—Eva-Dina Delgado. An act so outrageous that even Michael Madigan opposed it.

And yet the *Tribune*—and Mayor Lightfoot, for that matter—went on to endorse Delgado.

That's probably because her opponent was Nidia Carranza, a schoolteacher who was endorsed by the Chicago Teachers Union. I think it's safe to say that the *Trib* and Mayor Lightfoot abhor CTU almost as much as I abhor the world views of Mary Miller and Marjorie Taylor Greene.

Apparently, nothing is as outrageous to the *Tribune* as a union of teachers who think it's a good idea to spend tax dollars hiring more nurses and librarians.

As opposed to spending the money on underwriting Lincoln Yards, an upscale housing development in an already gentrifying neighborhood. Speaking of things that should really outrage you.

For the record, I may have mellowed a little on the whole legislative handoff process.

At least, I was way more outraged when Heather Steans was appointed to fill a vacancy created when Carol Ronen stepped down. That was back in 2007—long before I'd ever heard of Mary Miller or Marjorie Taylor Greene.

On the other hand, I wasn't so outraged when Democratic committeepeople appointed Cassidy to fill a vacancy created when Harry Osterman stepped down to become 48th Ward alderman in 2011.

As you can see, getting appointed to fill a vacancy is like a coming-of-age ritual for north-side legislators.

Upon reflection, I wasn't really paying attention when Cassidy replaced Osterman. My attention was diverted by way more outrageous things. Like . . .

Mayor Rahm storming into office, hell-bent on proving how tough he is by closing mental health clinics in high-crime, low-income areas.

Still, I think the *Tribune* editorial on Cassidy and Steans sorta has a point—words I thought I'd never say. The whole vacancy-filling replacement project is a little, oh, undemocratic.

But look on the bright side. If she's appointed to replace Steans, Kelly Cassidy will have to run for reelection in about a year. So it's not as though voters won't get any say in the matter.

And getting named to fill a legislative vacancy is not always a guarantee of winning at the ballot box.

Consider the case of Mark Kalish. In 2019, Democratic committeepeople named Kalish to fill a vacancy created when state representative Lou Lang stepped down.

Then Kalish voted present on a reproductive rights bill, as opposed to voting for it. Even though he was supposed to be pro-choice.

Last year, Democratic voters bounced him out of office, replacing him with Denyse Wang Stoneback. Hooray, voters. Every now and then you actually get it right.

By the way, the *Tribune* editorial board supported Kalish over Wang Stoneback. Now, that really is outrageous. **BT**

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Percy Julian  Nova

CULTURE

The synthesizer

The Chicago labs of chemist Percy Julian brought us modern miracle drugs and much more.

By **DEANNA ISAACS**

You know the story of the brilliant chemist Percy Julian, right? The Alabama-born grandson of a man who'd had fingers amputated as punishment for learning to read and write while enslaved, his discoveries led to everything from water-based paint and a treatment for glaucoma, to firefighting foam that saved numerous lives in World War II. If you've used a birth control pill for family planning, you've benefited from his work. There's a high school named for him in Chicago, and a middle school in Oak Park, so his remarkable life should be familiar, but on the chance that it's not—as it wasn't for me or most folks I asked—PBS is offering a free stream of *Forgotten Genius*, its 2007 *Nova* documentary about Julian, through the month of February. It's directed by Llewellyn M. Smith and stars Ruben Santiago-Hudson as Julian, using a dramatized framework that has Julian narrating his own life.

His story of success in an environment designed to defeat him is the American Dream on steroids. Which, by the way, in their synthetic form, he also gave us.

Percy Lavon Julian was born in 1899, to a family passionate about education. But in the early 20th century Jim Crow south, public schools for Black youngsters ended with

the eighth grade. In 1916, when he entered Indiana's DePauw University—the only Black student there—he had to take simultaneous high school courses to catch up with his better-prepared classmates. By graduation, he was valedictorian.

Although he went on to earn a master's degree at Harvard, none of the prestigious American graduate schools would accept him as a PhD candidate. With the help of a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship he enrolled at the University of Vienna in 1929. There, he worked on the synthesis of plant compounds, found much broader freedom than he'd known in America, and, in 1931, with a thesis written in German, earned his doctorate. He returned to the U.S. with a friend and colleague, Josef Pikl, who became a long-term collaborator.

No career positions in academia were awaiting, however. In 1935, while working as mere lab instructors and research fellows at DePauw, Julian and Pikl became famous in their field. They solved a high-profile problem: how to make a synthetic and affordable version of a prohibitively expensive natural chemical (physostigmine) used to treat glaucoma. Their published paper, with Julian as lead author, refuted the work of an internationally known and respected chemist, setting off an academ-

ic furor.

More than a half-century later, this discovery, which staved off blindness for masses of glaucoma sufferers, would be recognized by the American Chemical Society as one of the 25 greatest chemical research accomplishments in the nation's history.

Still unable to land a job as a professor, Julian turned to industry, which wasn't much more welcoming. When both he and Pikl were invited to DuPont for interviews, Pikl was hired, while Julian was told, "We didn't know you were a Negro." An offer of a research job with the Institute of Paper Chemistry was stymied by the discovery that in Appleton, Wisconsin, where the Institute was located, it was illegal for Black people to be in town overnight. Finally, in 1936, the Glidden Company hired Julian as director of research for its new soybean division, and he came to Chicago.

At Glidden, Julian found a way to produce huge volumes of soy protein and his lab created uses for it in the manufacture of everything from paint to pet food to plastic. He also discovered a way to produce synthetic versions of the human sex hormones progesterone and testosterone from soybeans. And in the early 1950s, he developed a process that made it possible to mass produce cortisone from

soybeans (and yams), making this "miracle drug" widely available and affordable for the first time to sufferers from arthritis and other inflammatory ailments. In 1953, after Glidden decided to get out of the steroid business, Julian went out on his own, establishing Julian Laboratories in Franklin Park, where he could continue to work on steroids and other medicines. He provided a springboard for young Black chemists there, and made a personal fortune when he sold it, in 1961, to the company now known as GlaxoSmithKline.

In 1935, the same year as his glaucoma drug breakthrough, Julian married Anna Roselle Johnson, then a graduate student on her way to becoming the first Black woman in America to earn a PhD in sociology. Their first Chicago-area home was in Maywood but, in 1950, when their family included a son and daughter, they purchased a larger home in Oak Park. Racists greeted them with an arson attack on the house before they moved in and a firebomb afterward. In the documentary, Percy Julian Jr. recalls that in the aftermath of the firebomb, he got some bonus time with his usually busy father, standing guard in the yard at night.

The attacks only strengthened the family's resolve to stay. (To leave, Julian wrote later, "would have been cowardly and wrong.") And their daughter, Faith Julian, still lives there. She told me last week that she thinks her father, who had more than 100 patents and, in 1973, became the second African American and first chemist elected to the National Academy of Sciences, might have also been a Nobel laureate if it weren't for the racism of the time. "I think the things he did were so noteworthy, he really deserved [it]," she said, "but that was going to be an impossibility, for a Black man in that day. Had his skin been white it would have been a whole different story for him. He would have received all the accolades he deserved, and the roadblocks wouldn't have been there. All the obstacles that he met along the way, all the racism—that would have been nonexistent."

Percy Julian died of cancer in 1975. In 1980, DePauw University, which back in the day wouldn't hire a Black man as a professor, named its Julian Science and Mathematics Center for him. 

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BEST OF CHICAGO
2020 The logo for the Chicago Reader, featuring a stylized figure of a person reading a book.



✍ AMBER HUFF

undercounted on average at the rate of 7.7 percent, four times the rate for white people. (Hispanic was not fully listed as an option for ethnicity until 1980, though Latinos were also likely to be missed at a disproportionately high rate, the bureau later conceded.)

There had never been a year without a significant undercount since the first census, in 1790, when the three-fifths clause constitutionally mandated the undercount of Black people by 40 percent; the bureau had not counted Indigenous people at all until 1840. But hundreds of years after the repeal of the clause, and 17 after the height of the Civil Rights Movement, it was shocking that such clear racial bias remained in the country's most important data set. And with recent policy changes increasing the importance of census data to the apportionment of congressional seats and the distribution of federal funds to cities and states, the differential undercount started to be viewed as a serious threat to the voting rights of minority groups.

In the years leading up to the 1980 Census, the bureau conducted an apology tour of sorts. "We didn't do as good a job counting black people as we should have," Barabba conceded to the *New York Times* in 1974. Under his tenure, the bureau added programs and increased investments at federal and regional levels to increase census outreach in cities, where it was most likely to miss people, and made inroads with Black and Latino leaders, including Bobby Seale of the Black Panther Party and other important radicals, in the process of creating new Black and ethnic advisory committees.

While many applauded the bureau's gestures toward inclusivity, a growing group was critical of the bureau's plan to eliminate the undercount by putting more money and resources into the same methods that were missing millions. Instead, they posed a question that would open up a 20-year political, statistical, and legal debate about equity in the census: If Census Bureau statisticians were capable of calculating the number—and the demographic information—of the people they had failed to count, couldn't they add those people back into the data for the final tally? And if they could, shouldn't they?

In November 1979, as preparations were underway to conduct the most expensive census to date, the newly formed Illinois

Council for Black Studies organized a conference at the University of Chicago to discuss the history and political impacts of the census undercount on Black and other minority communities. It was the cusp of winter and snow was starting to fall, but still around a hundred people had made the trek, some from down the road in Woodlawn, some from across the city, and others yet from as far as Mississippi and Washington, D.C.

To Abdul Alkalimat, a founding member of ICBS and a professor emeritus of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, it seemed appropriate that a Black Studies council, which followed the motto of "Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility," should host a reform-oriented forum not just between the bureau and scholars but also organizers and the general public.

"There was a major concern that the undercount of Black people would diminish the possibility of Black self-determination," he said when we talked via Zoom in late July. Wearing a beige T-shirt and wire-rimmed glasses, Alkalimat swiveled slightly in his office chair. "[The census] became an issue that we were trying to link to Black Studies, which was becoming the most successful project of the Black Power Movement."

In the tradition of the field of Black Studies, the conference, "Black People and the 1980 Census," crossed disciplinary and political lines. A wide range of participants had been invited to share their perspective on the census and how its skewed picture of the country's population affected their work and communities. That list included organizers representing the South Shore Housing Center, the Woodlawn Organization (TWO), MALDEF (the Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund), and Chicago's Native community, to name a few; Chicago Public Schools deputy superintendent and chief operating officer Manford Byrd; Illinois First District representative Bennett M. Stewart and Mississippi senator Henry Kirksey; and Census Bureau deputy director George Hall (who attended in place of Barabba, who had fallen ill), among others—in short, a "who's who" in Black politics, scholarship, and Chicago organizing. For a census gathering, it was monumental.

It was clear that little was left untouched by incomplete census data: school district funding, hospital funding and distribution across the south and west sides of the city, affirmative action quotas, employment and

Losing count

For nearly 20 years, the United States was on the verge of adjusting the census and eliminating the Black undercount.

By **EMELINE POSNER**

In 1980, toward the end of a press conference on the state of the census count, Dianne Feinstein, then the mayor of San Francisco, turned toward Census Bureau director Vincent Barabba with a harsh warning: if he didn't recognize her requests, she said, "We may see you in court."

That year, it was just about the most ordinary thing that could have been uttered in a public exchange between a mayor and the head of the bureau, who would be on the defending side of no fewer than 52 lawsuits by the end of the decade. Like a growing number

of mayors across the country, Feinstein was frustrated by the persistence of an undercount and the appearance that the bureau's efforts to decrease disparities hadn't moved the needle much.

In 1973, the bureau had announced that 5.3 million people were not included in the final tally for the 1970 Census. The overall undercount for the nation that year was 2.5 percent—but the differential undercount, or the difference between the rate of undercount for Black people and white people, revealed serious racial bias. Black people were

unemployment statistics, the fight against gerrymandering in Mississippi, research on the economic and social barriers that Black women face.

At the center of discussion, however, was a bigger question. Census data had always been vital for House apportionments, redistricting, and funding. But over the last decade, the amount of federal funding distributed to states and cities via population data had increased. And the One Person One Vote Rule of 1964 now required that congressional districts be drawn to contain roughly equal population size to ensure that all residents in any given state had equal voting power. The rule was intended as a protection against the disenfranchisement of Black and minority communities, but, in light of growing public consciousness of the severity of the undercount, some questioned whether that promise of equal representation could be upheld.

This was a serious concern in major cities, where more than 75 percent of the country's Black population lived by 1980. In a presentation on the census undercount of Black people as the "new disenfranchisement," ICBS executive director and Northwestern political science professor Ronald Bailey wrote that it was possible that in the 1981 redistricting process, one of the three majority Black districts in Chicago could be expanded or combined with another district. He was particularly worried about the First District along the south lakefront, which had seen a dramatic ten-year population decrease of 70,000, almost a quarter of the city's total population loss that decade. How much of this declining population loss was compounded or overstated by the undercount?

Bailey calculated that the number of people missed by the census could easily equal the estimated population loss in the First District as well as in Black-majority districts throughout the country. If the Census Bureau did not adjust its counts to add those missed, he wrote, such "mechanical" use of its population figures would continue to "mask the characteristically racist and fundamentally undemocratic manner in which the American political system has historically functioned with regards to Black people and other oppressed nationalities."

Bailey had arrived at this conclusion using data made available by National Urban League research director Robert Hill, one of the people most responsible for shepherding the issue of the differential undercount into public view in the 1970s. The ICBS had invited

Hill to present on a procedure he had developed, through which the bureau could do just that—eliminate the undercount of every racial and ethnic group through an adjustment process.

This procedure, what he called somewhat understatedly the "synthetic method," was based on the widely accepted statistical assumption of the null hypothesis, that there is no significant difference between a population and smaller subpopulation groups. So if the bureau could calculate the national undercount for a certain demographic group, say young Black girls under five, or homeowning white men ages 35-39, then they could also calculate that rate of undercount (or overcount) at every area level from Illinois to Cook County to Chicago and assume it to be accurate. Or, more technically, not statistically different.

Crunching the undercount numbers for states and cities was something that the bureau had previously declined to do. But such numbers would be necessary for census data to be adjusted.

While the ICBS was eager to acknowledge the work of the bureau, and especially the regional Chicago office under director Stanley D. Moore (who was also present at the conference alongside regional coordinator for service programs Mary Grady, who had started a Black Census Day in Chicago), they were firm that there was no way forward without adjustment. "This is the era of Watergate, of COINTELPRO, and other gross government violations of the rights of people," Alkalimat had written in a statement for the congressional oversight hearing in Chicago, just weeks before the conference. There was little to suggest that the Census Bureau could counter such levels of deep-seated government distrust, especially within communities of color.

As an institution, the bureau's response to the suggestion of adjustment was mixed. Barabba persistently denied that adjustment would increase the accuracy of the count. But at the conference, some of his former and current staff spoke enthusiastically about the prospect. That included the bureau's former acting director Philip Hauser—a respected University of Chicago sociologist who had previously gone on the record saying that the bureau was "dumping money down the sewer" and that taxpayers wouldn't be out of line to tell census takers to "go to hell"—and the current deputy director, George Hall.

Despite the bureau's ambivalence, it was clear that Hill's method was not going to fly

under the radar. By 1979, Stanford Research Institute had recommended its use in the Office of Revenue Sharing, and the bureau had used the method to calculate the effects of adjustment on funding and political representation in response to a demand for such information by the National Urban League in 1975. The bureau was planning its own undercount conference for February 1980, and had even invited Hill to present his work.

But, at least in the winter of 1979, it wasn't yet convincing to the powers that were. When the ICBS had organized its conference, none of the major foundations Bailey or his co-chairs had approached had agreed to provide any funding—which is why its member departments had covered the expenses. ("They love for us to talk about nothing," Hill had complained at the conference, and one could basically see his eyes rolling through the text. "I find there is a correlation with lack of funds and seriousness," he added. "When they saw the agenda that was here, they knew that these people were serious.")

The lack of public support from traditional gatekeepers wasn't anticipated by the ICBS, but it didn't slow them down. Instead, they invested more to make sure the conference was recorded and printed to provide a record of the Black intellectual production of the time. "It is a mistake to think that the only pressure to be brought regarding the undercount issue is in that undercount meeting [hosted by the Census Bureau] in Washington in February," said Bailey. "In fact, *this* conference represents pressure. Who demands an adjustment, the Census Bureau asks?"

Six months later, in May 1980, Detroit mayor Coleman Young filed a lawsuit against the bureau and its parent agency, the Department of Commerce, for their failure to count Detroit's residents accurately and for the impact those omissions would have on city funding and on political representation for Black and Brown residents. Young demanded that the bureau adjust its data to mitigate the projected effects of the undercount in Michigan. His executive assistant Arletta Douglas had been in attendance at the ICBS conference the prior fall.

The count hadn't been completed yet, but the bureau had shared preliminary numbers with Detroit along with other major cities as part of a new program designed to decrease the undercount. Young found that the bureau's numbers departed significantly from the city's calculation of its population.

The case, *Young v. Klutznick*, was closely followed by the media, but it wasn't the only one that year. At least 51 other cases were filed against the bureau, the majority filed by cities, which had also come to question whether "Get Out the Count" initiatives would be enough to minimize the differential undercount.

In court, the Census Bureau took a hard line, arguing that adjustment wasn't permitted by the Constitution, which required an "actual enumeration" of every resident. Young's legal team, which was joined by Robert Hill and Philip Hauser, and a lawyer on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Mayors as amicus curiae, argued that not adjusting the data gave rise to a greater constitutional violation, that of the One Person One Vote rule.

The court ruled in favor of Young. In testimony, the bureau's own officials had admitted that the census regularly makes millions of adjustments as part of "imputation," the process of adding people who hadn't responded to the census back into the count. In 1970, these imputations had totaled 4.9 million, just about half of all the people whom the Census Bureau hadn't been able to reach.

"The decennial census undercount results in dilution of plaintiff's vote relative to the votes of whites within the State of Michigan," deciding judge Horace Gilmore concluded. "The undercount gives rise to a constitutional violation of the one-person, one-vote principle because blacks are simply not counted as much as whites, and this is particularly true in the inner cities of this country." He ordered the bureau to come up with a plan to adjust its data—not just for Michigan, but for the whole country.

Gilmore's order would be reversed in 1981, before the bureau could move forward with adjustment. In the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals the judges ruled in favor of the bureau on a legal technicality: The financial and political harm Mayor Young had claimed in 1980 was hypothetical, based on "a state of affairs not yet in existence," and therefore, Detroit didn't have the standing to file suit in the first place.

In fact, most data from the 1980 Census had been released and analyzed by this point. The numbers showed only a slight decrease in the national Black undercount, from 7.7 percent to around 6 percent, as well as in the differential undercount between Black and white people, from 4.4 down to 3.7. But these were national averages, and belied the more severe undercount in hypersegregated cities

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like Detroit and Chicago, where Black and Brown neighborhoods like South Lawndale were undercounted by up to 8 percent, twice the city's estimated undercount of 4 percent. But those rates may well have been higher: the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, which had estimated the undercount for the city and larger region in a 1989 paper, warned that their calculation of undercounts in Black neighborhoods were probably underestimates.

In the Sixth Circuit case, dissenting judge Damon Keith said that his colleagues were in the wrong, "avoid[ing] grappling with a serious question of constitutional harm."

Over the next six years, the bureau's associate director for statistical methodology and research, Barbara Bailer, who had previously testified against adjustment in the *Young v. Klutznick* case, quietly oversaw the development of a procedure to adjust the final numbers. The work was cut out for her team: the number of demographic categories had ballooned from 96 in 1979 to 1,392 in 1990. That meant that there were more than ten times as many undercount rates to calculate and then redistribute in the process of adjustment. And while the process of distributing the undercount in large cities was relatively straightforward, doing so for counties and cities with smaller populations, more sensitive to statistical adjustment by nature, created a point of unease for some demographers.

To Kenneth Wachter, a University of California-Berkeley professor emeritus of statistics, adjustment represented a Pandora's box of errors that could be introduced into the count. He worried that the post-census survey of 400,000 people was too small to be used as the basis for adjustment of the entire country's population. There were many ways, he said, in which the bureau could err in matching or identifying that survey's respondents while calculating the undercount. That would be all well and good in the process of assessing its own work—but in adjusting, a small error could multiply exponentially. To allay the concern, the Census Bureau had implemented several procedures, one of them "smoothing," which removed outliers and more extreme data points before and after adjustment. But these added yet another set of technical issues, Wachter said.

"A lot of these formulas work well if the world behaves," Wachter told me when we spoke by phone in November. "But in the context of the 1990 Census, on this huge scale, there were no

good ways to check those assumptions. The real world is very messy."

The field of demography and statistics was split by these questions. Wachter testified in several cases through the 1990s, joining the anti-adjustment side in arguing that the merits of adjustment were outweighed by the consequences of creating new and potentially flawed population totals for all the nation.

When I asked how he balanced the seriousness of the introduction of error against the



need for equity in the count of Black people and people of color, Wachter reiterated what comes to sound like a mantra by the end of our phone call: "Places, not races. Shares, not counts." Earlier, he had asked me to repeat this back to him.

What Wachter was talking about was "distributive accuracy," which came to define the conversation around adjusting the 1990 Census. The ICBS and proponents of adjustment had been pushing for distributive accuracy by race, in part to end inequities in how money and political representation were distributed. But what Wachter was saying was that the conversation shouldn't in fact be about race but about place—making sure that states and cities are receiving their "proper" share. Adjustment, he believed, would distort this distribution.

Certainly, this was not a point of universal agreement. Many scholars upheld the importance of distributive accuracy by race, and it was irrefutable that adjustment, in adding the disproportionately Black and Brown people who had been missed by the bureau back into the count, would increase the share of large, diverse cities—and thereby decrease the shares of states with whiter, less diverse populations. But it remained uncertain how much adjustment would rectify the

undercount in the most undercounted areas in those big cities, like Chicago's oft-cited Robert Taylor Homes in Bronzeville, which was undercounted at 29 percent in 1990 but only slated to see its population increased by a fifth of those who were missed.

Demographers and statisticians, sometimes from the same university department, could not agree on whether adjustment procedures would bring census numbers closer or further from the nation's "real" popula-

tion. To some, it started to feel like there was no good outcome. Leave the count unadjusted, and the differential undercount persists. Adjust the count, and potentially introduce other errors. As one *New York Times* journalist concluded somewhat pessimistically in 1991, "heads you lose, tails you lose."

Nevertheless, by 1987, Bailer had expressed confidence not just in the processes they had fine-tuned but in the fact that adjustment would improve the overall quality of the census data. The post of director was empty at the time, but by the time Barbara Everitt Bryant took the position in 1989, she too expressed unequivocal support for adjusting the 1990 count.

But shortly thereafter, Secretary of Commerce Robert Mosbacher shut down the conversation, overriding the bureau's tentative plan to adjust. Cities and states, still worried about the prospect of the undercount, once again filed suit. This time, certain states like Wisconsin also filed suit to *block* adjustment on the grounds of distributive accuracy, claiming that they stood to lose funding and political shares if their population data was adjusted. Both sides expressed outrage over what they perceived to be political interference.

In response to the Department of Commerce's override, Bailer resigned from her post. "It was a political decision, and if they had said it was a political decision, I might have lived with it," Bailer said in an interview with *Education Week*. "But they tried to make it look like a technical decision, and I couldn't live with that."

To Bailer, and to proponents of adjustment, the Department of Commerce was overstepping its bounds as a parent agency to the bureau. The major case filed against the Department of Commerce by New York argued that the decision was "arbitrary and capricious," and beyond that, in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act, which regulates the actions of federal agencies.

Increasingly, the debate over adjustment was viewed as a Republican-Democratic standoff, with Democrats pushing for more money and representation for the cities they often represented, and Republicans fighting against losing the same for their states. "If you look at the people who are usually undercounted—blacks, Hispanics, Indians, the homeless, and people who live in urban centers—well, they are not the kind of people who are registered Republicans," Bailer said to *Education Week*.

Though the partisan framing belied the more complex situation, there was certainly some truth to it: a report released by a Republican redistricting expert in 1994 predicted that the GOP stood to lose 24 seats if census data was adjusted. Whether the reverse was true was not as certain; a Brookings report argued that the political and financial benefits of adjustment were tangible, but minimal, pointing out that only several hundred million dollars of federal funds stood to be reallocated differently and that Republicans excelled at the art of gerrymandering, and the majority-minority district.

The judge on the New York case had ordered the Department of Commerce to conduct the post-census survey and convene a special advisory panel of experts before making a final decision regarding adjustment. The panel split four-four, with director Bryant in favor of adjustment and the under secretary of commerce for economic affairs against, though most agreed that the adjusted data set was more accurate than the original. Mosbacher acknowledged the majority consensus in 1991 when he announced for the second time that the census would not be adjusted, but insisted that "strict numerical accuracy"—the approximation of the *true*



POETRY CORNER

Mercedes says she prefers the word 'discoteca' to the word 'club'

By José Olivarez

give me words that sing.
ojala is three chickens laying brown eggs. hope
has its own music, but it's missing an accordion.
my friends are up to their usual shenanigans:
drinking good wine & being sad. my friends
don't get into trouble. trouble wears sombreros
& calls it a costume. my friends are traviesos
y malcriados y sin vergüenzas. let me translate:
DJ Ca\$h Era is making the walls sweat. slow jams
crawl through the speakers & our hips move
like someone spilled syrup over the night.
Mercedes is right. i'm always down
to go to the discoteca. A word that spins on the tongue
like a disco ball. keep your clubs. cops carry clubs
& in this poem there are no police.
someone spilled syrup over the night. it was us.
the moon is a chicken singing ojala ojala ojala.

José Olivarez is the son of Mexican immigrants. His debut book of poems, *Citizen Illegal*, was a finalist for the PEN/ Jean Stein Award and a winner of the 2018 Chicago Review of Books Poetry Prize.

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Event information and registration at PoetryFoundation.org/Events

Open Door Reading Series: Kristy Bowen, Iaaura goldstein, Dominique Dusek & Damon Locks
Highlighting Chicago's outstanding writers
Tuesday, February 9, 2021, 7:00 PM

Reading for Young People: Jillian Tamaki
A special Valentine's Day themed reading for ages 8 and under with Caldecott Honor book author and illustrator Jillian Tamaki
Saturday, February 13, 2021, 11:00 AM

Palabra Pura Fifteenth Anniversary Celebration
Reading and conversation with Francisco Aragón, Brenda Cárdenas, Miguel Marzana, and Johanny Vázquez Paz, and moderated by Mary Hawley
Wednesday, February 17, 2021, 7:00 PM



continued from 16

number of residents in the country—came second to distributive accuracy, which he said would only be improved in 29 states.

When the New York case was taken to the Supreme Court, the justices set what would become the standard for upholding adjustment-related decisions by the secretary of commerce: he had been neither “arbitrary nor capricious” in his decision not to adjust, and so the decision would stand. In 1999, when deciding another case filed by Indiana residents concerned about the dilution of their voting power, the Supreme Court then blocked the use of adjusted data for congressional apportionment—leaving it open, however, for the purposes of funding allocation and local redistricting.

To the statisticians who ran the bureau, the legal fight that began in 1980 had contributed to the politicization of adjustment and the takeover by the Department of Commerce. “The lawsuits have diminished the bureau’s autonomy,” Bryant complained, “moving adjustment decisions away from the purely statistical arena.”

Could the bureau have done more to make adjustment a reality? “This was the biggest statistical enterprise that had ever been conducted,” Wachter said. “It wasn’t that one side could prove they were worse, and another side could prove they were better. It couldn’t really be established whether they were better or worse.”

By many metrics, the accuracy of unadjusted census data has increased. Every year since 1990, the net and differential undercounts have decreased. In 2010, there was an overcount of 0.49 percent, down from 1.61 in 1990; the Black undercount had been more than halved from 1990 from 4.57 to 2.17 percent, the Hispanic undercount from 5 to 2.85 percent. The differential undercount between Black and white people remains, however, at around 3 percent. This steady decline in the overall undercount, Wachter said, is due to improved data and especially to the introduction of the five-year American Community Survey, which has given the bureau access to higher-quality data.

But charting census accuracy by undercount rate gives only a partial picture of progress toward racial equity. In a 2019 paper on the bureau’s data for omissions—that is, the full original undercount, the total number of people who don’t respond to the census, including those who the bureau “imputes”

back into the count—demographer William O’Hare found that there remain dramatic racial disparities. Compared to the 3.8 average omissions rate for white people, Black people had an omissions rate of 9.3 percent, Latinos 7.7. The differential gap between Black people and white people remained low in terms of how many people the Census Bureau was adding or removing as they calculated who they had counted twice and missed. But what O’Hare found was that even as their average undercount had dipped to 2.17, Black people were still being disproportionately omitted from the count by 5.5 percent. He recommended his data be used by states, cities, and local organizations to target their outreach in future census years.

It will be difficult to argue that there are no issues requiring attention pertaining to the 2020 Census count. Actions taken by the Trump administration in attempts to change the nature of the count—by including a survey question about immigration status and by threatening to exclude undocumented immigrants—have likely contributed to lowered response rates in spite of being struck down by the courts, as have complications because of the pandemic. It is almost certain that the undercount will rise, and with it, the differential undercount. A University of California-Los Angeles study published in early 2020 suggested that, even controlling for a general decrease in census responses because of COVID-19, the gap was growing between white people and people of color.

When I spoke with Bailey, he said that the efforts to undercut the 2020 Census remind him of what happened in 1980. The Federation for American Immigration Reform, a conservative-interest group now designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, had filed a suit in 1979 to remove undocumented immigrants from the count. But this census, Bailey saw a difference in how the powers that be responded to accusations of bias and inaccuracy. “That dedication to accuracy is not now the case,” he told me. He said that it felt like Republicans have decided “we have a pandemic that we know is hampering the count—there is 40 percent that still hasn’t been counted—and there’s no way we’ll be able to complete an accurate count.”

There hasn’t been much mention of adjustment for the 2020 data, though Bailey thinks that the prospect of an increasing undercount for the first time in several decades means the circumstances are right for a new conversation. And that there may be redistricting battles to watch in the lower courts

as states begin the process of redrawing their districts.

He’s not alone. In October 2020, incoming American Statistical Association president and chief methodologist at the Urban Institute Robert Santos told WBEZ that he expects legislation demanding adjustment will be filed by advocacy groups after the data is filed with the White House. “This will be perhaps the worst census ever,” Santos said. He anticipated the undercount would hit cities like Chicago hardest, leaving middle-class white suburban communities with the best count and a disproportionate share in funding.

But since experts never arrived at a consensus about the merits of adjustment, any renewed push would probably fail in the courts, where the decision of the secretary of commerce has almost always been upheld as “reasonable,” write lawyers Molly Danahy and Danielle Lang in a paper for the *University of Memphis Law Review*. (A notable exception is the 2019 Supreme Court ruling that deemed then-secretary of commerce Wilbur Ross’s push to add an immigration question both arbitrary and capricious.) There is, however, a “narrow but important” exception originating in a Seventh Circuit decision. If plaintiffs can prove an undercount is the direct result of “intentional discrimination” under the Voting Rights Act, it could bring the possibility of adjusted census data back to the table.

Forty years later, the conference that the ICBS hosted at the University of Chicago remains an important record in the archive of Black Studies and in the history of the Census Bureau.

On our Zoom call, Alkalimat interrupted me to bring up the 1840 Census, which he sees as crucial for understanding the stakes of the census and its data in the United States, where the Black undercount had long been a matter of law, enacted for the political and financial benefit of white landowners. The results from that year were used to prove that free Black people “tended to be more insane” than enslaved Black people. “You can believe that has been attacked, that has been exposed, and the Bureau of the Census in the U.S. government has never said anything about that,” he said. “So that remains part of the historical record of the census without any repudiation. Even within our scientific record, there are these examples of racism that fabricate an image that’s incorrect

scientifically.”

And it’s not just what’s done with the data, but what data is thought fit to be collected in the first place that’s a matter of politics. At the ICBS conference back in 1979, Waymon Watson, director of the South Shore Housing Center, identified the bureau’s failure to collect data about crucial housing issues, such as redlining, segregation, and absentee landlordism, as a failure to serve Black communities, which needed this information to organize against harmful and racist practices. As such, it was a double-edged sword. As long as “the Census data [was] blind at the neighborhood level,” he said, distrust of the institution among Black people would linger.

No one at the ICBS conference suggested that adjusting the census would fully resolve its bias or its use in supporting the racism of the status quo. But the ICBS had seen adjustment as only part of the battle. Their other demands included the training and hiring of Black demographers to participate in census analysis, and building a public-facing educational campaign to engage the broader public about the census, the resources that are tied to it, and who is impacted by incomplete data.

Alkalimat said that he sees the past year of uprisings as a “wake-up.” “It’s like—what! Somebody turned the light on in the room!” he said, laughing. He hopes that this new expression of anti-racism will reverberate within the scientific community, and that scholars will take on more responsibility for census education. The question of how to make the census important and accessible to people, and how to transmit that knowledge, was a central part of that 1979 conference. To that end, Alkalimat expressed relief and a sense of conviction that the ICBS had recorded the conference proceedings, establishing a record of the work of Black Studies in recentring the significance and failings of the census. Today, several copies of that orange-covered tome sit in stacks at the Woodson Regional Library, its 680 pages reflecting lifetimes of research, organization, and the fight against racism in all its forms.

“We really wanted to make sure that this conference was documented,” Alkalimat said. “Because a lot of things happen and they’re forgotten.”

This story was completed with support from Reveal’s Seeing 2020 Census Reporting Collaboration.

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ESSAY

When does drinking to cope become drinking too much?

Examining and altering our pandemic-induced substance habits nearly one year in

By **ADAM M. RHODES**

I used to drink so rarely that my doctors considered me a nondrinker. I used to safely estimate my drinking to be around one drink a month. I used to joke that I wanted to drink more, wanted to be able to appreciate fancy cocktails and fine wine.

But that joke turned into my not-so-funny reality when wishful thinking was crushed by the realization that a lockdown was not going to be a quick solution to the pandemic, but a long, difficult one that has no end in sight just yet. What started as more regular, but still casual, drinking at the start of the pandemic now feels like a nightly ritual. Cue the alarm bells in my head that I will likely be pushing down with a heavy bong rip.

My relationship with alcohol has always been a little complicated. I often wake up at least a little anxious after drinking, and roughly six months ago, I stopped being able to remember anything I did after I drank. Not just when I drank to excess. Any time. It could be a single drink or it could be 12, and I'd similarly forget what happened that night. More alarm bells.

Thankfully, my partner informs me I would

nearly always end up snoring loudly next to him on the couch; but regularly occurring blackouts haven't exactly been good for my anxiety either.

But I'm not alone in this journey. I have friends with eerily similar experiences, friends who have started regularly drinking at 3 PM, others who are nearly constantly stoned during the day. We all agree that we got caught up in the culture of winding down after a long day of work with a drink or a smoke.

But when the last year—or longer, depending on who you ask—has been long day after long day after long day, at what point does relaxing turn to dependence? To quote Vic Vela, a Colorado Public Radio journalist who celebrated six years sober from cocaine this week, that question is an individual one. And it takes what he said is an “honest inventory” of our lives.

“It's examining ‘OK, how many drinks did I have today? Am I drinking more? Am I just flat out drinking more during the pandemic? Am I OK with this? Is my partner OK with this? And just kind of go from there,” he told me. And truthfully, some answers to those questions

are “yes.” And some are “no.”

For folks who are similarly examining their own substance use, particularly during this difficult time, local photographer Sarah Joyce said that finding alternatives—like running, meditating, or hiking—could be an avenue worth exploring.

“Using this opportunity to come up with different coping mechanisms isn't a bad thing at all,” she said.

But even before the possibility of sobriety pops up in my head, more alarm bells sound, this time prompted by the fears that abstaining from alcohol leaves me and others like me out of social circles. Am I going to be the boring sober person, sitting in the corner while my friends rage in front of me? And with so much queer culture centering on substance use in some capacity, whether it's a mandatory mimosa at brunch, a bump in the bathroom, or some G at a circuit party, there's also a real fear that sobriety is a death knell to queer social life.

But as Vela and others told me, sobriety isn't the barrier people think it is, and much of that isolation is fabricated. In fact, he said,

sobriety has helped him feel and experience life more deeply, though I admit I'm not sure if that's exciting or terrifying in the year of 2021.

Vela wasn't alone in that sentiment either.

Steven Strafford, a Chicago-based actor and playwright, said that he didn't feel like he was missing out on life because of his sobriety; in fact, he said it oftentimes made him more present and more himself.

“Living your life as an unadulterated you, is exceptional,” Stafford said.

But the actual science of substance use is another thing. Take alcohol for example. According to Dr. Daniel Fridberg, a University of Chicago psychiatry professor who studies addiction and impulse control, said that technically, no level of alcohol is safe.

Admittedly not what I wanted to hear, but a strong argument in favor of sobriety. As for when substance use becomes a problem, the answer to that is less cut-and-dried. Fridberg said substance use becomes a problem when, as he put it, it begins impacting lives. But what level of impact is enough to warrant sobriety?

That, as much as it feels like everything related to sobriety, seems to also be up to the individual person and their using habits. Ugh. More introspection.

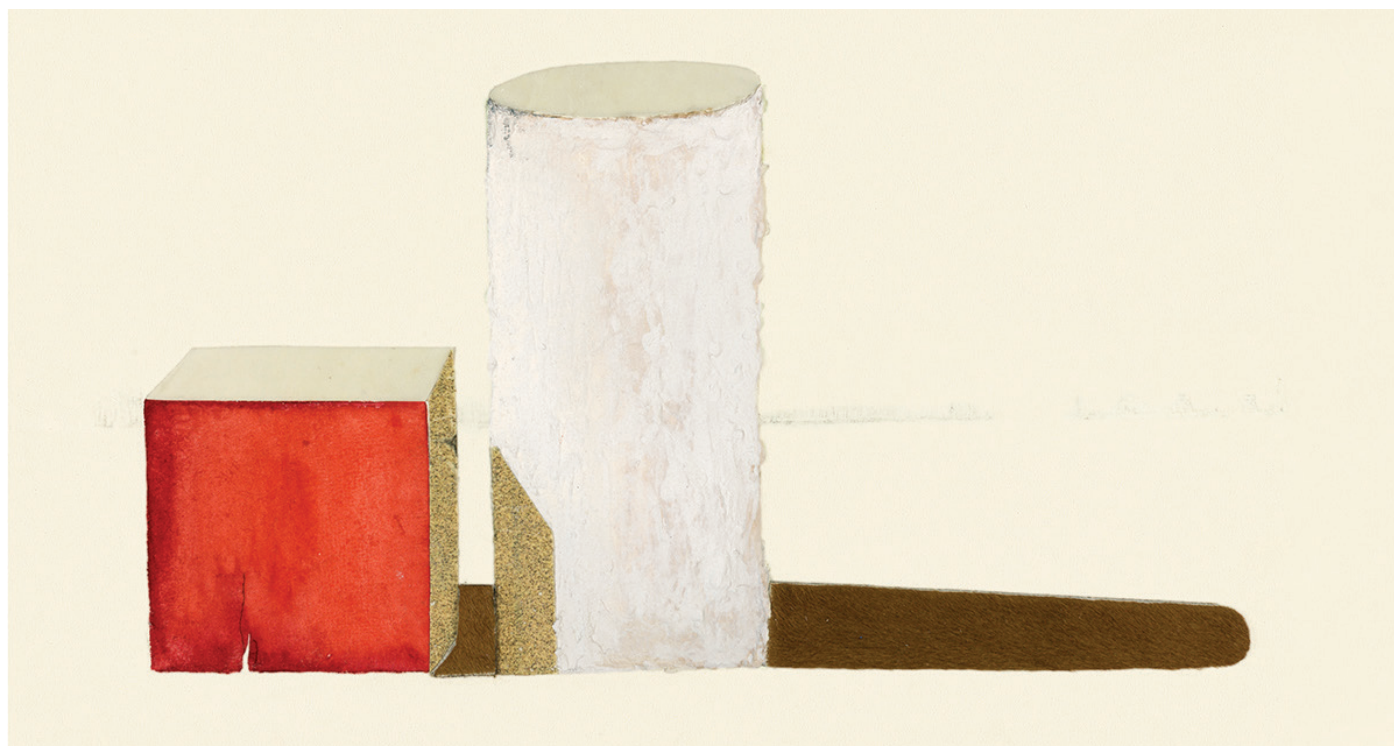
But just like everyone's relationship with substance is different, so is everyone's relationship with their vice. And it doesn't always have to be an all-or-nothing approach.

In fact, to be as extremely corny and on the nose as possible, most of the people I spoke with said they take it . . . wait for it . . . One. Day. At. A. Time. And it makes an obnoxious amount of sense.

“If I go to bed saying I didn't drink as much today, that's a good day,” Vela said. “Can I go to bed saying that I treated people with respect more today, and I didn't hurt anyone? That's a good day. So again, and with each single day of ‘one day at a time,’ that becomes a cumulative thing and you accumulate time; and that's the only reason why I'm able to celebrate six years of sobriety is because I said those things every single day.”

So, with that in mind, I may not be putting down the weed or the wine just yet; but tonight I'm going to bed having had less to drink and less to smoke. And I think that's a really good start. 🍷

🐦 @byadamrhodes



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LIT

Theorem is more than a book of poetry

Evoking memory and mystery, two artists collaborate on an art piece.

By S. NICOLE LANE

I read *Theorem* in the bathtub. My feet were propped up as I made sure I didn't get the bottom of the pages wet (a bad habit I have). The book opens with an image of a red cube and an off-white cylinder. "At 13, I fell in love with the tidy solution of geometry," reads the text. *Theorem* is not what you may expect from a book of poems. The long text is a push-pull relationship between writer and artist. The reader is immediately thrown into the conversation between two artists, separated by distance. Elizabeth Bradfield's text poses life's questions, while Antonia Contro's drawings, watercolors, and collages reference time and travel. In a year so hectic, so traumatic, I found myself pausing for the first time in what felt like months. While holding this book, I think I found the ability to relax.

Bradfield and Contro were friends for many years before they began their collaboration. Bradfield, located in Massachusetts, and Contro, located in Chicago, were introduced through a mutual friend. "Different as our

worlds were, we recognized one another as dedicated artists who also lived in other worlds and, indeed, who valued those other worlds," explains Bradfield.

For years, the pair talked about collaborating. "Then, in 2017, when Antonia was on Cape Cod, she handed me a maquette [a mock-up] of a book she'd made from her journals for another project," Bradfield says. "I think she said, 'What about this?' She went upstairs to her studio space in the temporary rental, I settled in on the couch below, and, 'Yes,' I thought. 'This could be the thing.'"

When Contro traveled back to Chicago, she left Bradfield the book. After ignoring it for days, and eventually months, she began to write in a dune shack in Provincelands. From her writings, she explains that she tried to find a genuine story to engage with. "And from that, *Theorem* was born," she says.

I ask Contro the same question about their collaboration and friendship. I'm interested in how *Theorem* came to fruition, how these

two artists decided to work together. Contro explains that when she left Bradfield the book, she wanted her to sit and ponder it. "Later that fall, she sent the book back to me—accompanied by text she had written in response to my images. It took my breath away." Conversations, planning, collaboration, and years of ruminating were put into *Theorem*. It is a very intentional art project and it's clear when turning each page.

In much of Bradfield's text, she questions childhood memory. Alongside a drawing of a mountain and clouds, Bradfield writes, "We lived on the west side of the western mountains yet / I don't really remember rain. / (I am very good at forgetting. I still am)." This particular image strikes me—both the drawing and the text—as I grew up in Appalachia, in the foothills where it seldom snows. I'm back there again for two months, taking care of some family business, and it's currently snowing heavily outside of my window. Last week, I had to abandon my car on the side of the road because it wouldn't make it up the mountain. As a child, I don't remember any of this. As a teenager, I only remembered rain. When reading Bradfield's words, I'm struck by our childhood memories: what we choose to remember and what we don't. How are our memories formed? How do we choose what we want to permanently stay?

With memory, comes the feeling of loss.

Whether that's between Bradfield and her sisters, or the mystery of what once was, themes of loss and secrets recur throughout the book. This reflects painfully on our year living in a pandemic. A year of bereavement, pain, and confusion. But this feeling of loss doesn't hurt the book. Bradfield writes about childhood in a curious way. It's all a mystery, rather than a casualty. Complemented by Contro's intentional and soft drawings, the book gives the reader the gift of reflection, beauty, and repose. After I turned the last page, I sat with it for a while before opening it up again and rereading it for a second time. I simultaneously feel the weight of this last year on my shoulders in addition to the weightlessness of letting go.

Contro has been an artist since she was a young girl. Though she got her MFA in painting later on in life, she says that drawing has always been at the foundation of her work. She describes herself as an artist whose work lies anywhere from site-specific installations to collaboration that engages artists from various disciplines.

Bradfield is a naturalist, a guide in her everyday life. When I ask her about the influence of her career on her writing she says, "I balance my life between two vocations: biology (natural history, in particular) and literature (poetry, in particular). I call them both vocations because while sometimes they are jobs, I pursue them both because they feed more than my refrigerator. Both are vocations dedicated to close observation and to the seeking of questions. Both push me to ask: 'What puzzles me here? What moves me? What seems strange? What do I know or not know?' And then to seek answers—either through research or through writing."

When reading *Theorem*, the images complement the text; however, they do not entirely illustrate the story. Contro explains that this was "absolutely critical." The two artists wanted the text and artwork to stand on their own. There are two versions of *Theorem*—the fine art edition and the trade edition. In the fine art edition, the text and images are displayed on independent pages, and in the trade edition, the artists worked to see which images and text should be displayed together.

"We want the text and images to have an associative rather than descriptive relationship—neither text nor image illustrating or

ARTS & CULTURE

mapping the other but expanding and deepening the meaning of each other; and in key places and moments, provoking questions and presenting complexities of interpretation,” says Contro. “*Theorem* posits that we have experiences, and memories of these experiences, that we spend a lifetime trying to understand, calculate, feel, and see.”

I’m particularly interested in the inclusion of maps in the writing and in the imagery of Bradfield and Contro’s works. Collaged maps, and text alluding to direction, fill up a few pages of the book. Bradfield explains that she loves the physical and applied use of maps. When I ask her more about the tie to maps, she says, “Place, too, is something that looms large in my writing. The nuances of how place influences memory, experience, and even ‘truth’ obsess me. What does a pitch pine mean on Cape Cod, where I live, compared to a muskeg in southeast Alaska, another place I hold dear? The resonances are different. How do we map those geographies? I don’t have an answer, but I think the pursuit of such an answer is valuable.”

There’s also a distance between the two artists—one from the Cape, the other from Chicago—which I find interesting in their relationship. Collaborating via the post office, mailings, technology, and FaceTime calls were all a part of the design and production process. Though they weren’t collaborating side by side, their process and means of communicating culminated in a dialogue of words and images.

Theorem begins and ends with a red image. When I finish the text, it almost startles me. After pages upon pages of fine drawings and muted hues, the red color cleanses my palate. Contro says, “Red saturates the two final images of the book. We both wanted a concluding image that was powerful, emotional, engulfing, transportive.” The saturated page makes me feel like I’ve just finished a long walk. The words are lyrical as they carry you along the journey of *Theorem*. Bradfield’s recollection of time and Contro’s smart drawings propel readers into a contemplation of the self. I found myself sighing, stopping and reflecting, radiating, and by the end of it, I felt—most importantly—at ease. 

 @snicolelane

Announcing THE READER INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY JOURNALISM Board of Directors

The Chicago Reader is moving to a nonprofit journalism model this year. The Reader Institute for Community Journalism (RICJ) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. RICJ is now operating and accepting contributions at www.chicagoreader.com/donate. Chicago Reader L3C is winding down operations parallel to the operation of RICJ, while the L3C completes PPP loan forgiveness.

The following are the RICJ board of directors.

Eileen Rhodes, Director and Chairwoman

Eileen is president of East Lake Management, the largest African-American-owned real estate company in Chicago, focused on affordable housing development and management. She is also co-owner of Blanc Gallery, which showcases the work of underrepresented communities.

Dorothy Leavell, Director

Dorothy is Editor and Publisher, The Crusader Newspaper Group. Leavell continues to be at the helm of the Black Press of America. Since 1968, she has served as editor and publisher of the Crusader Newspaper Group—Chicago and Gary, Ind.—after the death of her first husband Balm L. Leavell Jr., co-founder of both publications in 1940 and 1961, respectively.

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Carol is Executive Officer of Business Development for East Lake Management & Development Corp.; previously served as Vice President of B. Coleman Aviation, LLC. (affiliate of ELMDC). She also helped the *Chicago Defender* newspaper during a critical turn-around era. Director and Treasurer for Ada S. McKinley Social Services and Trustee of East West University, both Chicago, Ill.

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Alison is the Marilynn Thoma Artistic Director of the Chicago Humanities Festival. She has more than 15 years’ experience developing cultural and other programs for diverse publics, including 10 years at the NPR affiliate in Chicago, where she gained a national profile as the host of WBEZ’s flagship program Eight Forty-Eight.

Sladjana Vuckovic, Director

Sladjana is an attorney who practices in the areas of criminal, transportation, and personal injury litigation. She has been a trial lawyer for the past 23 years in the areas of criminal and insurance defense litigation.

Kim L. Hunt, Director

Kim is executive director of the Pride Action Tank, a project incubator and think tank that focuses on LGBTQ+ issues that is a project of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, where she also serves as the senior director in the Policy & Advocacy department.

Vanessa Fernandez, Director

Vanessa is the Sr. Manager of Development at Resilience Force. For nearly a decade, Vanessa has been fighting for a more equitable and just economy for poor communities and communities of color. As a fundraiser and project manager, she supports organizations that build power for working people by developing and expanding institutional and individual giving programs.

Jackie Kaplan-Perkins, Director

Jackie has been recognized as one of the city’s dynamic leader and consummate connector whose life’s work has focused on equity, diversity and advocating for the disenfranchised and underserved. Jackie has worked in senior leadership at Movement Voter Project, Human Rights Watch, Shriver Center for Poverty Law, Chicago Foundation for Women and with Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky.

artist, writer, performer?

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ARTS & CULTURE

“Roots”

Through 2/14, Evanston Art Center, 1717 Central, Evanston, evanstonartcenter.org. Please call 847-475-5300 for entry. All visitors are required to wear masks and take their temperature upon entry using provided gloves, and share results with an EAC staff member.



Susan Smith Trees manipulates polyurethane expandable foam in “Roots.”  ASHLEIGH PASTOR

VIS ART

Bursting and bubbling

Artist Susan Smith Trees works with the unknown to encourage the “known.”

By S. NICOLE LANE

My God, I love a fleshy piece of artwork. When artists make works that are burgeoning and mysterious, I’m immediately drawn to them like white on rice. So, I’ll go ahead and say I’m a little biased when it comes to Susan Smith Trees’s work.

The Chicago-based artist has been making work for 35 years. Her show “Roots” opened this month at the Evanston Art Center’s (EAC) second-floor atrium gallery. In the gallery, Trees’s expandable foam wall reliefs hang delicately and pronounced. They appear otherworldly and mysterious. They demand attention.

For Trees, material drives her process. “I have always been stimulated by a variety of materials. The experimentation is the key to discovery,” she explains. Trees began her sculpture practice with clay and has expanded to working with stone, cast resin, thermoplastic, expandable foam, as well as pen and ink drawings.

By manipulating the form, Trees’s sculptures look at abstraction and draw from the form of the human body. The bulbous, frothing pieces appear veiny and alive. The lumps hang on the walls of the gallery, bursting with life as the sculptures contract, bubble, and grow like

organisms under a microscope. These orifices are detailed, yet I’m unsure of what they remind me of. I describe them as human forms, something removed from a body, but are they? While they appear to be living and breathing, the works aren’t one particular body part or one particular organ. They queer the body and disrupt our idea of nature.

Not all of Trees’s sculptures are textured with detail. The work *Stretch* is less crinkled and more polished. In fact, it’s smooth and onyx in color. It rests on a pedestal, appearing like a membrane or a cell under a microscope. Still referencing bodily qualities, this work appears in mid-motion as it curves upward from the floor. Worm-like and slinking, *Stretch* is in the spotlight on its white podium.

On the walls and hanging from the ceiling are Trees’s expandable foam sculptures. I’ve worked extensively with expandable foam in my own practice so I know how this material takes on a life of its own. It’s sticky, messy, it gets on everything, and it bulges at such a rapid pace that you have to let go of any control.

I’m curious about Trees’s process and how she works with a material that defies authority and takes on its own shape. Trees tells me

that she begins by spraying polyurethane expandable foam into piles. She explains that because the foam expands quickly, before it hardens, she peels it away, stretches it, and tears the material to create rippled forms. She says she enjoys the unpredictability. “By the act of manipulating the material, I experiment and explore the possibilities and witness what is revealed.” In a way, Trees collaborates with the material. She navigates most of the direction that it will take, but ultimately the foam will do what the foam wants to do.

Her thermoplastic works are made up of melted plastic which she heats in water. “When the material obtains a leathery consistency, I remove it from the water and soak it in paint,” she says. “As it hardens the color becomes embedded in the substance. I then reheat the material using the same procedure. When it becomes of a malleable consistency, I shape it over molds of rocks and wood and earthenware. As the material dries, it is kneaded and rolled and pulled to create biomorphic-like forms.” Trees’s work is very tangible, very process-focused.

Having this sort of freedom in art-making is refreshing. Much like our body forms, each work takes on a unique shape. Whether they are on the walls or hanging from the ceiling, Trees’s sculptures appear heavy and prominent. In fact, the viewer may not realize it, but expandable foam is very light in weight. In the same way that she manipulates the physical form of the works, the presentation is also manipulated. These works appear foreign in material and hang delicately along the walls of the gallery inviting viewers to peer longer and deeper inside. They are displayed like magnified organisms—both earthly and alien—on the white gallery walls. The relationship between material and artist is obvious. Trees’s closeness with her works is apparent, although some distance is necessary as these materials forge their own paths. This is what makes the works so strong. While Trees is the creator, the sculptures conclude their metamorphoses.

“I put my trust in the materials,” Trees says, “because they put me in touch with the known.” 

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Introducing CIVL SAVE

Alice Blander, Annah Garrett, and Shannon Nico Shreibak

In a time characterized by waiting—waiting to leave the confines of our homes, waiting to see our loved ones closer than six feet away, waiting to truly exhale—those of us who have found ourselves estranged from our usual gigs in Chicago's illustrious independent music scene knew that waiting was simply not an option. In a matter of days following March 12, 2020, COVID-19 splayed across the country, tours were scrapped, venues were shuttered, and income for a majority of music industry workers slipped away like sand through a sieve. As months drifted by, we, like many other industry professionals, found ourselves disillusioned, disenfranchised, and grasping for a life raft. With neither an end to the pandemic in sight, nor sufficient government assistance for the music venue staffers, artists, and touring professionals that power Chicago's—and the world's—live music ecosystem, it became clear that the solution would be an inside job.

As a city and as an artist enclave, Chicago was built on a legacy of scrappiness. It can be felt in the disposition of its residents and the sound of the music that colors the city. For the vitality of Chicago's independent music venues to be wrested in the vigor of its staffers felt all too appropriate. Thus, a small team of Chicago Independent Venue League (CIVL) member venue employees began work on the CIVL SAVE Emergency Relief Fund, an effort powered by The Giving Back Fund that will provide micro-grants to fellow Chicago music venue workers and local artists in need, as well as the institutions themselves. And we decided to raise the money by doing what we do best: promoting (virtual) shows, slinging merch, and recruiting the time and talents of creatives we admire.

Aside from being a perfectly apt name, SAVE stands for Staff, Artists, and Venues. Our team

wanted to highlight the fact that the continuous moratorium on live events affects not only the business owners, but also the thousands of performers, staff members, and independent contractors who have lost their livelihoods. It's easy to underestimate the robust inner workings of an independent venue: the irreplaceable box office, security, production, bar staff, building maintenance, and booking/marketing/ticketing gurus who make the magic happen. Being that we understand each other's distress firsthand, the primary round of applications are designed by venue staff for venue staff. In order to maintain transparency and equity, we've conducted surveys and led a virtual town hall in order to gather input, which has made the CIVL SAVE Emergency Relief Fund truly tailor-made for the collective needs of our extended music family.

Thanks to the support of loyal Chicagoans and far away fans, CIVL has raised invaluable funding thus far. We encourage anyone and everyone who has the means to support the individuals who are responsible for some of your favorite concert memories in one way or another. You may donate directly to the fund at CIVLChicago.com or purchase merchandise designed by local artist Maura Walsh. If you'd like to apply for funding, sign up for CIVL's e-mail list for more information.

What is CIVL SAVE hoping to "save," exactly? We hope to save our colleagues from one more unpaid bill, from further financial woes than those that this past year has wrought. To send crucial aid to some of the toughest souls we know, those who embody Chicago's grit and tenacity, who will continuously forfeit sleep to make an experience unforgettable—because that's what they do.

It is all these things and more than words can express.

Chicago Independent Venue League (CIVL) is a coalition advocating for nearly 50 member venues in and around Chicago, all independently owned and operated. They can be found at CIVLChicago.com

Bull Horn is an avenue to give wings to the stories that matter most. This series, from Red Bull in partnership with the Chicago Reader, will invite guest writers, artists, activists, and community members to share their ideas and amplify timely, crucial topics they feel are important now.





Nameplate from the *London Story Paper*, where Nellie Bly's novels were serialized. COURTESY DAVID BLIXT

UNCOVERING HISTORY

Whoa, Nellie!

David Blixt finds a treasure trove of 11 unpublished Bly novels.

By KERRY REID

In 1885, the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* ran an op-ed under the byline “The Quiet Observer” entitled “What Girls Are Good For.” In the view of Erasmus Wilson (owner of the pseudonym), the short answer was essentially staying home and making babies, where they could “play the part of angel.”

Elizabeth Jane Cochrane was having none of that. The 20-year-old, whose father died when she was six and who dropped out of college due to lack of funds, wrote a letter to the editor, signed “Lonely Orphan Girl.” She told the men in charge that they knew nothing of the plight of working-class women. It so impressed managing editor George Madden that he put out an ad seeking its author. When she appeared in the newsroom, he gave her a job and a new nom de plume: Nellie Bly, after an 1850 song by Stephen Foster (though they got the spelling wrong on the first name).

Bly's intrepid reporter instincts took her from Pittsburgh to Mexico, where she spent six months as a foreign correspondent, and finally to New York, where she became a star for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, going undercover as a patient to investigate the brutal

conditions in the Women's Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island (now Roosevelt Island). Her 1887 book, *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, made her a household name and led to some (small) reforms in mental health treatment. She won further fame when she outdid Jules Verne's Phileas Fogg and traveled “around the world in 72 days,” as described in her 1890 book of that title.

David Blixt is a Chicago-based historical fiction writer (Lifeline Theatre adapted his Shakespearean spy thriller, *Her Majesty's Will*, in 2013), and theater artist whose stage credits include acting at the Goodman and Michigan Shakespeare Festival (where his wife, Jan Blixt, is artistic director) and lots of fight direction. The latter is what led him indirectly to an obsession with Bly.

“I can pinpoint the exact moment. I was reading an article in April of 2016 in the *Atlantic* that was about how there were more female action stars in Hollywood a hundred years ago than there are today. And that fascinated me, and it's right up my alley,” says Blixt. “So I started looking at the movies they were listing and you know, it's all the *Perils of*

Pauline, it's all the silent films of the intrepid young woman discovering some dastardly deed or whatever. And looking at movie after movie, each one said ‘based loosely on the life of Nellie Bly.’”

Blixt started researching Bly, and ended up writing three fictional books based on Bly's life: *What Girls Are Good For*, *Charity Girl*, and *Clever Girl*. But in the course of his research, he stumbled across a treasure trove of unpublished novels by Bly herself.

Bly published one novel in her lifetime: 1889's *The Mystery of Central Park*. Says Blixt, “She wrote 11 more for a serial weekly newspaper published by her publisher, Norman Munro, whose brother George kind of popularized the dime novel. And so he and his brother split about a decade earlier and Norman went off on his own.

“He found huge success in publishing Nellie Bly and also the Allan Quartermain books and detective stories and romances. The *New York Family Story Paper* was his big engine. Every week you'd get eight pages of new stuff, and Bly ends up writing for them and getting an enormous salary. She got \$40,000 over three years. And everyone just kind of figured, ‘Well, that was money that was thrown away’ because nobody knows about her novel.”

But Blixt found out that Munro did a knock-off of his paper overseas—the *London Story Paper*. And while only one issue of the New York edition exists in American archives, complete sets of the London version were stored on microfilm in London, Sydney, and Toronto.

And that is where Bly's unpublished novels lived on, hidden from public view for 125 years.

After spending “weeks and weeks” scanning through the Bly collection online (and spending New Year's of 2020 in Toronto transcribing sections from the microfilm that weren't legible), Blixt had a bundle of Bly books. He released ten of the previously unpublished works late last month, just in time for the anniversaries of the publication of her first story (January 25) and of her death at age 57 (January 27).

One of the novels Blixt decided to leave unpublished because “It leans hard into the same racist tropes as *Gone With The Wind*.” Notes Blixt, “She wasn't any more racist than anybody at the time, but she certainly has Chinese characters speaking in dialect and it's offensive, and Black characters sometimes speak in dialect and that's offensive.”

The new novels, released as e-books, audio downloads, and print through Blixt's Sordelet Ink publishing house, were mostly inspired by Bly's reporting, and bear sensationalist titles such as *Eva The Adventuress: A Romance of a Blighted Life* (based on an interview Bly conducted with Eva Hamilton, the “scorned wife” of Alexander Hamilton's great-grandson, while she awaited trial on charges of attempted murder). Each of the books comes with the original art from the *London Story Paper* and the news stories that inspired them. Blixt is also releasing the two-volume collection *Nellie Bly's World*, bringing together all her *New York World* pieces from 1887-1890, and a

THEATER



David Blixt; illustration of Nellie Bly from *London Story Paper*, March 28, 1891 PHOTO BY BRIAN MCCONKEY;
ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY DAVID BLIXT

complete collection of the reporting that first brought her fame, *Into the Madhouse*.

Blixt notes that, while Bly's "stunt journalism" made her a household name, that portion of her career was short-lived.

"After the race around the world, she was having health problems, she was having migraines. The stress of it was too much. So when she comes back in '93 to be a reporter again, she stops doing the stunt thing entirely. They hand that off to another woman named Meg Merrilies, and Bly is purely interviews and investigative journalism. No more stunt stuff. They still bill it as stunt stuff—'Nellie Bly and the elephant! Nellie Bly and the tiger!'—but she's not undercover anymore."

Though Bly has appeared in several incarnations in pop culture (including two episodes of *Drunk History*), Blixt found it difficult to get agents and publishers interested in his novels about Bly. "It's one of those things where I was told that there was no hook, no one would be interested. And I kid you not, one agent suggested to me that I make her a vampire or a detective or even a man. 'There's no hook.' I was told this again and again, nobody would be interested in a straight story of her life. And I'm like, 'You're kidding me. You've got to be kidding me.'"

Blixt thinks part of the issue is that Bly's approach to undercover journalism itself is now seen as "trickery. And for some reason, we've eschewed trickery from journalism. People poo-poo it, but it was revolutionary at the time. And needed. People still do investigative

journalism, but it didn't exist back then in the way that we can think of it today."

The 1978 month-long undercover "Mirage" series in the *Sun-Times*, exposing corruption among Chicago city inspectors, got heat from *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee, among others, for its use of misrepresentation in pursuit of the story. And perhaps now "undercover investigation" makes us think more of James O'Keefe's ethically dubious and politically motivated Project Veritas.

But for Blixt, the passion that motivated Bly to write that first letter to the editor is what held his interest throughout the past several years of research, writing, and editing. "What made me set aside everything and devote those five years to Nellie Bly was how she got her first job. How angry she was."

She didn't need to be a vampire, a detective, or a man to make her mark. Says Blixt, "Lois Lane is a direct analog to Nellie Bly. My tagline as I started researching her was 'The Real Lois Lane Didn't Need a Superman.'"

But in Blixt, she's found a fan and ally. 

 @kerryreid



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**BEST OF
CHICAGO
2020** 



Ross Compton and Melanie McNulty in
Theatre Above the Law's *Constellations*
TYLER CORE

RR READER RECOMMENDED

ALL AGES

FREE

EXISTENTIAL ROMANCE

Connecting across *Constellations*

Theatre Above the Law drops the masks—momentarily.

By CATEY SULLIVAN

In COVID times, gestures that would have been banal and forgettable a year ago now arrive embedded with loaded backstories—even those (especially those?) that play out on stage.

For the past year and a half, actor Melanie McNulty has been prepping to open *Constellations*. In September 2019, Theatre Above the Law artistic director Tony Lawry cast her as the astrophysicist heroine in Nick Payne's mind-stretching, multiverse-pondering exploration of love, the cosmos, and the infinite capacity of the human brain to both define and betray the very heart that feeds it.

At first, the two-hander also starring Ross Compton was slated to open in March 2020. It was postponed. Then it was postponed again. And again. About a year after McNulty and Compton were cast, TATL decided to do it as a virtual production, which opens this week.

The commitment made, the cast and two-person crew (Lawry and stage manager Stina Taylor) embarked on weeks of Zoom rehearsals and quarantine, punctuated by COVID tests for all four.

Eventually, the group stepped off Zoom and met for tech week in TATL's Rogers Park space. It was the first time the maximum-45-seat Jarvis Square Theater had been used for live theater in almost a year. With Taylor taking on chauffeur duties so the actors could avoid public transit, the group did two days of masked rehearsals. Then, they all did another COVID test. Then there was an extraordinary moment

of wrenching ordinariness.

Compton and McNulty dropped their masks. McNulty recalled experiencing a heady sense of marvel.

"There was a slight moment where I felt like I was naked. The air, suddenly on my face. But that went away, and it was just sheer joy. I'm watching someone smile and laugh and breathe, right in front of me.

"After so many hours of rehearsal where all I could see was my scene partner's eyes, it was liberating."

It was also brief.

"It felt pretty sweet during that part of tech, to have that freedom," McNulty said. "We all have to do what we have to do to stay safe—I'm not complaining about having to wear a mask or anything else I have or need to do. But yeah. I was pretty melancholy after, knowing it's going to be a long time before we have that kind of freedom again."

For Lawry, it was a defining moment in a production he'd been committed to for the better part of two years. Lawry said he's always found Payne's elliptical tale of an astrophysicist and the beekeeper who loves her an emotional roller coaster. Smart romantic comedies are his go-to genre, and this one had humans dealing with quantum physics and aphasia and string theory in addition to drunken sex, major trust issues, and witty wordplay.

He did not, however, expect it to be quite the emotional roller coaster it became.

"This was supposed to start our fourth season," he said. "We were coming off our first Jeff Recommended season, our first Jeff nomination—we were riding that wave, thinking this would be a great thing to end on, keep the momentum going.

"Nobody wanted to let it go. We kept postponing it and postponing it. We thought about doing it outside somewhere in the summer, but that didn't feel safe. And the city wasn't giving theaters space to do outdoor performances like the restaurants were getting for outdoor dining.

"So by late last fall, I was like, 'We just need to do it, even if it's just for us. We've all been prepping for this show for so long, and I'm afraid if we postpone it anymore, we might not all be able to do it together. So let's get it out of our system so we can move on, but we have to figure out a way that we can do that without shortchanging the brilliant material in any way and we have to be safe.'"

Lawry bought a green screen and came up with a production budget that was mostly about editing and filming. (Credit for video goes to Max Zuckert; George Pitsilos and William Schneider created the sound.)

CONSTELLATIONS

Opens Thu 2/4, 7:30 PM CST; through 2/28, Fri-Sat 8 PM CST; also Sun 2/28 3 PM CST, 773-655-7197, theatreatl.org, \$15.

Lawry wanted to replicate, as much as he could, the feeling of an actual play you could see in person in the Jarvis space. There were times over the past year when Lawry wondered whether the Rogers Park space would survive, at least as Theatre Above the Law.

"There were a couple months when it was iffy—our landlord has been OK. We got a couple of grants, not what we'd hoped for but some. It's month by month. We just extended our lease for six months. We're good through August. But I wouldn't be truthful if I didn't say my stimulus money goes into the theater's bank account.

"I have an ensemble that's just as passionate as I am. So we've done some Zoom murder mystery fundraisers, and they've put everything behind them," Lawry continued. "And our neighbors have been so supportive. I feel like we're very much a part of our community. Like, even people who didn't attend the online fundraisers bought tickets. The restaurant across the street [R Public House] did this pairing dinner thing, where if you bought a

certain dinner, we got part of the proceeds. Life's Sweet is doing a honey tart as a dessert, only on show nights.

"We got 20 new subscribers during a pandemic for a season that's totally up in the air which I think is pretty great for our little storefront. It's a tight-knit neighborhood, and I really love being a part of it," he said.

That season is not entirely up in the air. In March, Lawry hopes to drop a reboot of their 2017 world-premiere adaptation of *Cyrano*, only this time as a radio play complete with ad jingles. In May or June (or later), there's a world premiere of *War of the Worlds* on deck, only this time, as Lawry explains, "The heroine is a 13-year-old girl and the aliens are gross men."

Finally, TATL will close out with Compton's *Henchpeople*, a three-person comedy about which Lawry will say nothing else except for "I really hope we can do it for a live audience by then. But we'll see."

For now, Lawry and his cast and crew remain immersed in *Constellations*, and the often weirdly apropos existential dilemmas Payne's characters insist you think long and hard about. Take, for example drunk-but-still-an-expert-physicist Marianne's science-based statement that "We're just particles governed by a series of very particular laws being knocked the fuck around all over the place."

McNulty has given it some thought.

"In this play, there are multiple universes we're jumping in and out of, and depending on which one you're in, you see a different version of Marianne. And this version has seen some things that have hardened her. This is the Marianne who says emotions don't compute, so I'm just going to bury my head in my spreadsheets and data."

"What I love about this play," she added, "is that the playwright took something as convoluted as string theory and quantum mechanics and turned them all into a love story between two human beings.

"At the beginning of all this I spent a lot of time questioning what I had to give. What is an actor's role when everything is crumbling around us? What can we offer? This was bogging my mind for a while," she said. "I don't know all the answers. But this play makes me think about how I am spending my time. Am I doing what brings me joy? Am I being loving? Am I being me? The play makes you realize you really have to ask those questions, because we might not have a lot of time." ■

@CateySullivan



Rebecca Fons (left) leading a CIFF education screening of *The Hate U Give*. **■** DAN HANNULA

PROFILE

Rebecca Fons leads Gene Siskel Film Center into a new era

The new director of programming prepares for the return to in-theater viewing and beyond.

By KATHLEEN SACHS

At this stage in our nearly year long exile from cinemas, the text emblazoned on the stairs of the Gene Siskel Film Center now reads like a prophetic assertion: “Just a few more steps to great movies.”

Having stayed closed for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, the Film Center—often referred to as just “the Siskel” by local cinephiles—is no stranger to the dual condition of discouragement and optimism that’s become two sides of the same coin for those in the arts during these trying times. Back in July, 13 of the Film Center’s 19 employees (including longtime associate director of programming Marty Rubin) were unceremoniously let go as part of wide-reaching layoffs at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, under which the Film Center is a public program. Then, in November of last year, the organization announced that their director of programming, Barbara Scharres, would retire after 45 years in the job, signaling the end of an era at one of Chicago’s most important exhibition venues.

But with such developments comes a passing of the torch. Earlier this month the Film Center announced that Rebecca Fons would be coming on as the new director of programming (part-time for now) until the much-anticipated reopening of the theater, when it’s intended that she’ll assume the role on a full-time basis.

I spoke with Fons about this new opportunity and learned that one of the first items on her agenda is, as one might expect, to continue honing the Film Center’s virtual cinema offerings. “We’ll be closed for a while,” she says. “We’re not going to reopen, you know, tomorrow. So immediately [we’re] thinking about virtual. Exhibitors across the country pivoted to virtual programming so quickly, and distributors did, too. So [we’re] thinking about how we can utilize that virtual space. It’s essentially another screen.”

We spoke via Zoom after Fons had completed a long day at her current—and soon-to-be concurrent—job as director of programming

at FilmScene in Iowa City, where she attended the University of Iowa as an undergraduate; she’ll continue to work at FilmScene until she becomes full-time at the Film Center. She received her masters in Media Management from Columbia College Chicago, during which time she interned with the Chicago International Film Festival. That internship led to a job as the festival’s education director, a position she held from 2007 to 2016.

Her next step would take her back to her moviegoing roots. Fons is from the small town of Winterset, Iowa (population 5,190, as of the 2010 census), where in 2015 her local theater, The Iowa Theater, closed. Her mom, who raised Fons and her two siblings as a single mother, had an idea: she suggested they buy it.

“She was like, this is where you saw the world,” Fons says. “This is where you realized your passion, in the seats of this movie theater. Should we buy it? Should we rehab it? Is that a crazy idea? And I did not think that was a crazy idea. Who doesn’t want to rehabilitate a movie theater?”

After establishing a nonprofit organization and raising roughly a million dollars to rehab the space, the new-and-improved Iowa Theater reopened in 2017. That same year, Fons got the job at FilmScene, commuting back and forth among Winterset, Iowa City, and Chicago, where she still had an apartment with her husband, Jack C. Newell, himself a filmmaker and program director at the Second City’s Harold Ramis Film School.

“The magic of the moving image has kind of always been my north star,” she says. “The arts are where I find myself at home. I’m very, very fortunate to have a career where I can do what I love. Even though it’s been kind of all over the place, it’s been a true pleasure.”

Fons is especially compelled by what drives moviegoers’ viewing habits, as the path from the couch to the theater seat has taken on further significance with exhibitors around the world looking forward to a return to in-person programming. “There’s this huge question of, what do people want to see when they come back to the movie theater for the first time in what will be over a year for most people,” she says.

While the Film Center’s virtual cinema is one of her more immediate concerns, Fons is already thinking long-term. She assures me

that much of what makes the Film Center the cultural bastion it is will stay the same. “There are absolutely long-standing partnerships and programs that will continue,” she says. “Black Harvest is a great example . . . certain things like that will not change at all. Long-standing series that are the spine of the Film Center won’t go anywhere.”

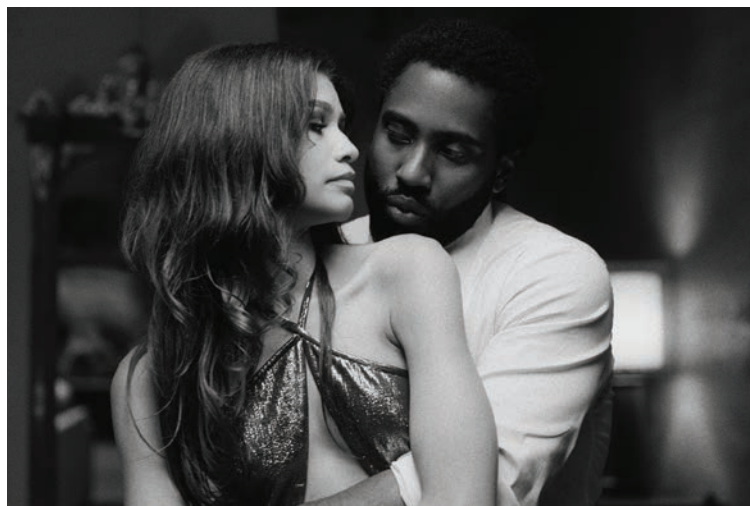
But: “I’m also interested . . . [in] looking at programs that in the past haven’t worked, and they’re sort of just limping along, and figuring out if there’s a way to activate them in a new way or move on. This is an interesting time to be able to do that.”

Some of Fons’s ideas include exploring the potential for late-night grindhouse offerings, and on the flip side, a series of films geared toward families. And like many curators, Fons is considering how the Film Center can expand on its already robust programs showcasing films by and about groups that aren’t properly represented in mainstream cinema, such as the aforementioned Black Harvest Film Festival, the Annual Festival of Films from Iran, the Chicago Palestine Film Festival, and the Asian American Showcase, among others. Fons is part of the Alliance for Action, a working group of Arthouse Convergence that brings together programmers, exhibitors, film festival staff, and even some distributors to discuss issues related to equity.

“There are only two screens at the Film Center,” she says. “It’s a limited landscape, it’s a limited canvas, and so thinking about how by programming female filmmakers, filmmakers of color, we become the influencers, the Film Center becomes the influencer and guides Chicago patrons and audience members to an understanding of the film community and storytelling. I think there’s a huge responsibility of the programmer, and I take it on with much reverence.”

Navigating a more-or-less traditional exhibition space during a global pandemic and various occurrences of societal unrest—during a time when many are taking the arts for granted, as is evidenced by a general disregard for those workers displaced by the crisis—Fons, like others in her position, has her work cut out for her. But still, she’s not willing to let click bait headlines announcing the death of cinema distract her from what she knows to be true about the communal moviegoing experience.

“I truly do feel that when we’re able to come together as an audience in the movie theater, it’ll be like the cloud is lifted and, oh, right, this is the best thing in the whole wide world.” **■**



Malcolm & Marie

NOW PLAYING

RR *Atlantis*

In the not-so-distant future (2025, to be exact), eastern Ukraine is a virtually uninhabitable wasteland where water is scarce and the arid landscape is littered with abandoned mines. At the beginning of Ukrainian writer-director-cinematographer Valentyn Vasyanovych's conspicuously spare third feature, two veterans of a recently concluded war with Russia take turns doing target practice, which devolves into one of the men shooting the other in his bulletproof vest—in a subsequent scene, the tormented aggressor throws himself into a pit of melted iron ore. The man who's left, a similarly PTSD-afflicted former soldier called Sergiy (Andriy Rymaruk), is soon established as the protagonist of this severe examination of life after war; he gets laid off from his job at a factory and finds a new one delivering water. He also begins working with an organization that salvages the remains of unidentified soldiers, where he meets Katya (Liudmyla Bileka), the two forging a tentative romance amid the economic and ecologic depression of their homeland. Vasyanovych conveys much of the plot through enveloping medium-long shots and protracted takes in which it's often initially unclear as to what's happening—sometimes there's little context to the activity onscreen, while other times the action is obscured altogether. Vasyanovych's aesthetic is commanding, with occasional experimental flourishes and the rendering of a post-apocalyptic hellscape comparable to The Zone from Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*; it feels well-trod, however, another art-house-inflected trip through something we've seen before and, in our ever-increasingly wartorn civilization, no doubt will again. In Ukrainian and English with subtitles. —KATHLEEN SACHS 106 min. *Gene Siskel Film Center From Your Sofa*

RR *The Dig*

By common consensus, there isn't allowed to be more than one major movie a year that's set at an archaeological site. Whether this is a shame, or whether one topsoil-and-shovels movie a year is already too many, is a question of principles. Leaping into the highest echelons of dig movies is *The Dig*, directed by Simon Stone with a screenplay by Moira Buffini. Typical period dramas pretend to offer history laid bare, with every layer of intervening time between our lives and the characters' denuded away by movie magic. Here's one that recognizes that historical reconstruction on film is itself a kind of archaeology; as with that down and dirty science we see in action here, the pleasure is in the digging. What's found is for museums.

Ralph Fiennes plays the self-taught archaeologist Basil Brown, who hits upon the discovery of a millennium during an ostensible leisure project on a landed widow named Edith Pretty's estate in pre-World War II rural Suffolk. Regional authorities want to file it under Viking and be done with the thing, but Brown insists that what he's found is older, much older, and he's right. (Fiennes's dialect, part of a magisterial working class performance at every level from an actor we're used to seeing play aristocrats, is a marvel throughout; he says "Voiking" and I cheer, it's that simple.) Ms. Pretty (her real name, would I lie?), played with frayed nerves, poor health, warmth, and magnificent screen elegance by Carey Mulligan, gives Brown free rein over the site, even after the British Museum and its detachment of card-carrying scholars arrive to claim it. To them, Brown is no archaeologist but a mere "excavator." The film's portrayal of class is razor sharp. Much of its drama comes from the tensions between self-taught expertise on the one hand and prestige on the other. "I may not be a fellow at Cambridge," Brown intones, cradling his pipe, "but I worked out what was down there."

Exhuming the remains of forgotten worlds is not only the movie's subject but also its method. Mike Eley's cinematography fills the frame with clouds and wide

skylines, then plunges us into the dirt itself, with Fiennes often seen caked in dust and, in one crucial scene, nearly buried alive. The work of pulling bodies and their worldly effects out of time's annulling darkness is set against Europe on the brink of all out war; biplanes whiz over the site, reminders of death in life and life in death. There are moments of the movie that feel over-attached to its admittedly low stakes. Getting the site of an Anglo-Saxon burial ground catalogued before Europe goes to war doesn't scream movie material. But when it gives its metaphors the space and scope to breathe is when this gem of a picture shines brightest. —MAX MALLER 112 min. *Netflix*

RR *#Like*

It's been one year since the death of Rosie's (Sarah Rich) sister, and she still wants answers. With no help from the police or anyone around her, Rosie takes matters in her own hands to track down the man she believes bullied her sister to suicide. Sarah Pirozek's debut feature is an energetic look at one young woman's quest for justice, revenge, or whichever best fits the bill. *#Like* is also a refreshing retelling of the torture film. While the dark basement setting and intense interrogations feel familiar, *#Like* gives Rosie all the power and lets her do whatever she wants with it—and Rich's layered performance makes it impossible to look away. *#Like* can feel underdeveloped when it takes Rosie out of the torture room to maintain her relationships in the real world, but it's fascinating to watch her figure out what it is she wants and what she needs to do to get it. —CODY CORRALL 93 min. *In wide release on VOD*

Malcolm & Marie

Lush and claustrophobic, Sam Levinson's new film stars John David Washington and Zendaya as the titular Macolm and Marie. The couple return home after attending a premier for Malcolm's new movie and a series of arguments ensue, revealing both the softness and the brokenness in their relationship with each other. The performances in this film are stellar, Washington's frenzied mania playing off of Zendaya's sinuous slow burn. The cinematography is also exquisite, the film shot in luminous black and white with some truly spectacular tracking shots. The story, however, has the feeling of standing on the street and watching someone's muted domestic tableau unfold through a well-lit window. A sense of voyeurism sparkles. Still, the initial effervescence fades as one fight becomes two, then three. How long can someone stand outside a house and hold interest in the scene in the window? Perhaps not nearly two hours. —NINA LI COOMES 106 min. *Netflix*

Preparations to Be Together for an Unknown Period of Time

With Hungarian writer-director Lili Horvát's second feature, it's less a question of "Will they or won't they?"

than "Are they or aren't they?" Márta (Natasa Stork, a scintillatingly enigmatic presence) is an accomplished Hungarian neurosurgeon who's spent much of her career in the U.S. She meets another Hungarian doctor at a conference in New Jersey, where they arrange to meet up a month later on a bridge in Budapest. Márta makes the trip only to be stood up; when she tracks down the doctor at the hospital where he works, he claims not to know her. Likewise dismayed and intrigued, Márta moves back to Budapest, takes a job at a nearby hospital, and begins following him, meanwhile attending therapy to determine if perhaps she invented the circumstances of their alleged meeting; mirroring Márta's self-deception is that of a young medical student who's enamored with her, convinced that she returns the sentiment. Overall I appreciate the intent of this modern take on the gaslight noir, in which we not only experience the purported delusion from the woman's perspective, but also accompany her in a journey toward discovering the truth behind her fixation. One can't help but to be pulled in by the narrative machinations—the ambiguity of the premise is duly evocative, played for genuine suspense—which makes the underwhelming revelation toward the end all the more frustrating. Like Márta's own obsession, it might be that whatever's good about this film exists only in your head. In Hungarian and English with subtitles. —KATHLEEN SACHS 95 min. *Music Box Direct*

The Weasel's Tale

Much like making a movie, scheming is often done best when undertaken as a collaborative effort—these two worlds collide in this middling dark comedy from Oscar-winning Argentine writer-director Juan José Campanella (*The Secret in Their Eyes*). A remake of Jose A. Martínez Suarez's 1976 film *Yesterday's Guys Used No Arsenic*, it stars Graciela Borges (the lead in Lucrecia Martel's *La ciénaga*) as a once-illustrious, now-faded star tormented by her longtime house guests, a pestiferous writer-director duo with whom she and her infirmed actor-painter husband worked in their heyday; they've become increasingly enmeshed with her husband, much to the old woman's chagrin. She embraces the illusion of escape from her unconventional living situation when two young developers trick her into selling her regal (albeit crumbling) country estate, the attractive chisellers a formidable match for the actress's wily, ersatz family unit. Not wishing to leave their comfortable arrangement, the three men of the house conspire to ward off the interlopers; along the way, deception and mysteries on both sides come to light. The premise is entertaining, especially with its sporadic moments of genuine macabre humor, and the central cast adds charisma where the narrative otherwise falls flat. In total, however, the filmmaking is often cheesy and rote, and it feels overly long compared to what it's offering. In Spanish with subtitles. —KATHLEEN SACHS 129 min. *Gene Siskel Film Center From Your Sofa* 

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Music workers' jobs disappeared, but their bills didn't



With federal aid to venues only now arriving, how are tour managers, stagehands, bookers, and their colleagues in the concert business making ends meet? **BY MICCO CAPORALE**

BOBBY SIMS

Before the shutdown of live music this past March, if you'd asked tour manager Kat Lewis what she expected to be doing in February 2021, she would've been able to describe her workdays right down to the bands she'd be having wake-up coffee with. After nearly 20 years of booking and managing music events such as Warped Tour and West Fest Chicago, her life had settled into an unusual but predictable rhythm: she'd schedule commitments two years in advance that would require her to work in clusters of long days, starting around 2 PM and ending just as the sun came up.

It wasn't the sort of beat that just anybody could tolerate, but it had its rewards. Lewis, 39, had grown up in a working-class family in Connecticut but had been able to buy her own split-level home in Logan Square. She had a fiancé and a yard with a vegetable garden. They had money in the bank and plans to start a family. The couple got married in October (a five-person ceremony, including the officiant), but over the past year the pandemic has forced Lewis to surrender almost everything else: her house, her savings, and at least for now even her Chicago address.

Lewis's situation isn't what people typically imagine when they hear "gig worker," but it represents the reality of many workers in the live-music industry: employment is piecemeal and often on a contract basis. When it dries up, there are few safety nets—and COVID-19 has caused the equivalent of a civilization-ending drought. Wide swaths of the live-music ecosystem are populated by independent contractors and freelancers (1099 workers, as the IRS classifies them), including not just many musicians but also behind-the-scenes laborers such as roadies, sound techs, and independent promoters. Unlike employees who receive W-2s and whose employers pay into state and federal unemployment funds, these 1099 workers aren't usually eligible for unemployment benefits. They're presumed to be not working by choice.

The CARES Act created Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which among other things extends benefits to gig workers who don't qualify for traditional unemployment. But it's often tricky for 1099ers to establish a base income or demonstrate lost wages, because their workloads can be so unpredictable. And if someone freelances while earning W-2 wages, the state can choose to calculate benefits based only on the latter. Music workers may also have to account for cash tips, or for checks issued to one band member but split between four. These financial concerns

are hard to document, and because they aren't being taken into account by policymakers, they could impact the ability of the live-music sector to rebound after COVID.

At the end of December, Congress finally passed a version of the Save Our Stages Act, which had been introduced in June. This \$15 billion stimulus bill, now technically retitled the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant Program, offers grants to entertainment venues (concert halls, clubs, theaters, museums, movie theaters) that can demonstrate revenue losses of more than 25 percent. The grant amount is capped at 45 percent of 2019 income, and a second round of grants, half the size of the first, may be available to venues with losses of 70 percent or more.

Venues receiving SOS grants will render themselves ineligible for future Payroll Protection Program loans, but PPP relief was never a good fit for live music in the first place. Venues would sometimes exceed the allowed number of employees due to their heavy reliance on part-timers and freelancers, and because of their disproportionately high overhead—especially rent—they continued to bleed money unsustainably even with their payroll costs covered for a few months. This past summer, Beat Kitchen and Subterranean owner Robert Gomez told the *Reader's* Leor Galil that SubT's monthly expenses totaled \$12,000 even when it was shuttered.

In July, the National Independent Venue Association surveyed its 2,000 members and estimated that 90 percent of independent music venues would face permanent closure without aid targeting the industry. Since then, Chicago has lost several beloved spots, including Danny's Tavern, the California Clipper, and Crown Liquors. It's difficult to say if more timely help from the feds would've saved them, but Save Our Stages at least offers hope that people like Lewis will be able to hit the road with bands again when the U.S. can fully reopen.

However, many music workers fear the long delay in passing the act means it's too little, too late. The primary effect of Save Our Stages will be to keep some venues afloat so that they'll be around to rehire people (or bring them back from furlough) once relative normalcy returns. For now, most of the work their employees used to do just doesn't exist. SOS grants can legally be used to pay staff, whether W-2 or 1099, but not if they're already receiving unemployment benefits—and since aid took more than nine months to arrive, most venue staff who can get those benefits already are.

The broader relief bill of which Save Our Stages is a part provides for second, smaller

stimulus checks, an extra weekly \$300 in unemployment benefits for ten weeks, and the extension of the PUA program. But those are all general measures—unlike SOS, none of that money is earmarked to help the especially hard-hit live-music business.

Nik Brink, 30, has been a stagehand and live sound technician in Chicago for more than ten years, employed exclusively as a 1099 worker. He studied photography at Columbia College and played in bands, gradually becoming more involved behind the scenes at shows. When the Affordable Care Act was signed into law in March 2010, it allowed him to stay on his father's health insurance until he was 26 while he grew his connections in a field that seldom provides full-time work or benefits.

"I'm really lucky," he explains. "My wife—she's a Chicago public school teacher. So she makes . . . not enough money for us to survive." He laughs dryly. "But almost enough money for us to survive."

Brink's wife has health benefits through her job, so the couple were able to welcome a baby in May. But between the demands of family life and the increasing precariousness of live music, Brink does not plan on returning to the field.

Much of his work came through Chicago Stagehand, a labor service that connected vetted stage workers with venues. (It's now defunct.) Stagehand wasn't affiliated with a union, but it still required employees and employers alike to meet standards of expertise and compensation. Brink was also a contract worker for A&A Studios, which provides and services many of the photo booths in Chicago. Without live events, there's little need for photo booths either.

Luckily, Brink qualified for PUA as a contractor in May—but only after spending eight hours on hold with the Illinois Department of Employment Security nearly every business day for two months. His daughter arrived just two weeks after his first round of benefits. That money, plus two stimulus checks, has been just enough to keep Brink afloat and allow him to invest in cybersecurity classes. He's hoping to be certified and knowledgeable enough to find full-time work in IT safety by the time the city opens up again.

"There were two years where I was just doing stagehand work on the side, and I got an office job," Brink says. "I sat at a desk every day, and after a while, I couldn't look at myself in the mirror. I hated being at the same place every day, doing the same work. I wasn't even sure how it was helping anyone or . . . doing

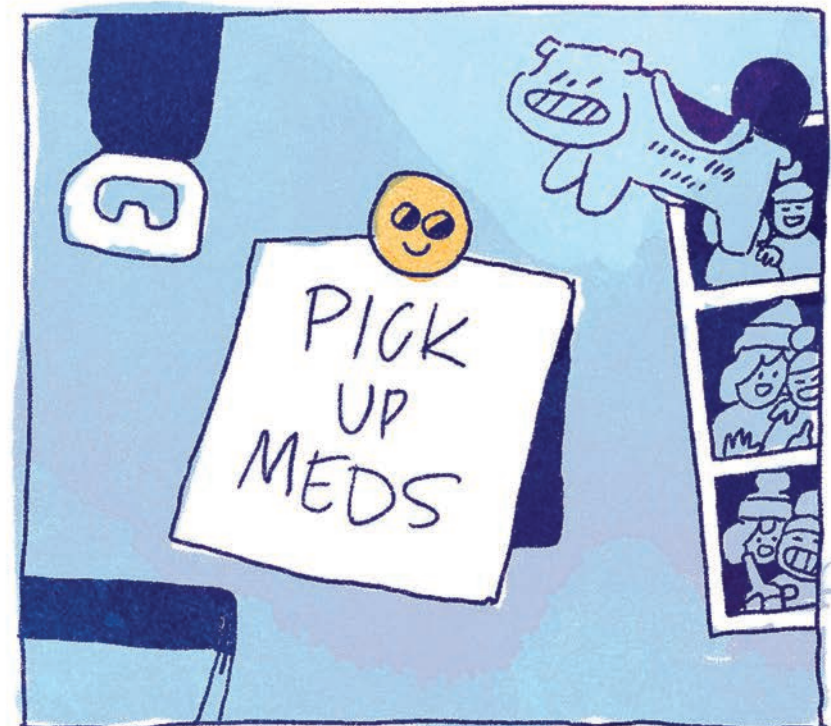
anything! It was absolutely horrible for my mental health. And there are so many creative people that I know—stagehands, musicians, even people who run photo booths and bars—just people that can't sit down at a desk and do that kind of work every day. It's soul-crushing to them in a way it isn't to others."

Even people who'd be happy to transition from the live-music business to an office job sometimes end up told they're not a good fit. When venues first shut down, Lewis took any and every temp job she could find, but she couldn't land interviews for long-term white-collar work. She's organized and level-headed enough to secure an emergency tour bus in the middle of Wyoming at 4 AM, but she discovered that employers didn't think her skills would translate to an office environment.

As the weeks of lockdown stretched into months and Chicago moved among various phases of reopening and shutting back down, Lewis's husband saw his construction work dry up. She applied for unemployment and got denied; she says she was told she didn't meet the state's criteria for contract workers impacted by the pandemic, though by her own count she'd spent 318 days last year working festivals and shows. She contested the decision twice, was denied both times, and couldn't afford a lawyer to take the fight further.

Lewis and her husband were renting out the basement of their house to a band, but they nonetheless blew through their savings quickly. They felt forced to sell their home and move back to Connecticut, where her husband now puts in as many as 18 hours per day between shellfishery work and construction while she babysits and does under-the-table accounting for two local businesses and waits for live music to come back. Their last day off together was their wedding day, four months ago.

Not everyone who relies on touring is suffering like Lewis, but many share the anxieties she feels. Schenay Mosley is part of hip-hop collective Zero Fatigue and since 2017 has been supporting herself primarily as a background singer for rapper Smino. She ended 2019 by performing at the Red Bull Music Festival in Chicago and then at Smino's fourth annual Kribmas concert in Saint Louis, where he announced a collaboration with Nelly and subsequent touring. Music has taken Mosley all over the United States and the UK as well as to Africa and Australia. In 2020, she was looking forward to more international adventures and preparing to release two solo albums. COVID-19 had other plans.



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Now she's providing virtual vocal and piano lessons through My Music Lessons in Oak Park. Her solo music is popular enough that she can expect a modest check from streaming services every month, and she was able to qualify for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan through the Small Business Administration. Mosley has a BA in music business from Columbia College, so she knows about some of the resources and protections available to help her make a long-term commitment to her music career. She's also had collaborators and mentors who taught her pitfalls to avoid. Setting herself up as a sole proprietor—basically a business owner without employees—allowed her to qualify for SBA assistance.

"Applying for it wasn't hard," she explains, "but it's very tedious. You have to have a business bank account and tax information. I don't think that it's hard for the average person, but you have to make sure you do everything exactly right and get it in on time." Mosley hired a friend to file the application on her behalf because the process was so time consuming. According to a poll by the Music Workers Alliance, an estimated 9 percent of musicians who applied for PPP loans have received them, and significantly fewer EIDL loans have been granted overall.

Other established musicians I spoke to described similar experiences—studio musicians and composers, for instance, are riding out the pandemic by combining smaller-income opportunities such as virtual concerts and donations with SBA assistance and grants. Everyone reports significant pay cuts, which squares with the MWA's poll data. Chason Rice, a musician as well as a talent buyer for Bourbon on Division, blew through his modest savings early in quarantine, but he's been able to stay afloat thanks to unemployment benefits, three private grants (including one from the Grammys), and one public grant through the Illinois Arts Council's Arts for Illinois Relief Fund (awarded in October). He's glad for the funding SOS will provide, but he's angry about how long it's taken.

"Our government response to the pandemic compared to other first-world countries has been a joke," he says. "There's been nowhere near enough aid."

Mosley is relatively business savvy, but even she describes a difficult landscape for musicians trying to shore up their collapsed finances. "A lot of these grants are extremely specific and closed off," she says, "like for classical musicians, but I'm not in the classical world. It's hard for average artists to really get support. . . . I would like to see more support

for 1099 workers, even if they're not artists. Just period. It's so hard for all of us."

One bright spot is that Illinois allocates more money to arts grants than many states with similar or greater populations—and it took steps early in the pandemic to preserve that funding. Of course, such grants are usually awarded to institutions or artists, not to people working behind the scenes in live music. And unfortunately the pandemic has also affected Chicago's extraordinary devotion of public resources to its robust creative community. In 2020, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) had a budget of \$40 million. This year, it's only \$24 million. Some of that will pay for artists' grants to fund projects such as full-length albums, but even in the best of times, this money is difficult to secure.

"I've been on a couple state- and city-level panels for reviewing grants," says Olivia Junell, development and outreach director for Experimental Sound Studio. "It's always very striking how narrow the pool of applicants is. The applications are on the Internet; they require reading a lot of detailed instructions." Right out of the gate, that disadvantages applicants with learning disabilities or trouble accessing the Internet.

"People who aren't used to writing grants or using very specific, formulaic writing to describe what they do often don't make an attempt," Junell continues. "There's not a lot of opportunity to understand someone's work or its impact outside of that form, so they're being judged on how they convey that in this restricted space. It's mainly musicians or artists who have been through some sort of academic system who apply and get it."

This leaves a lot of people fighting through bureaucratic barriers for a scrap of the dwindling financial help available. One musician who contacted me via Twitter DM has been forced to do gray-market work to survive (and thus wants to remain anonymous) because their unemployment benefits were calculated to reflect only their extremely sporadic part-time W-2 work at a popular nightspot.

"I've been lucky that [the club] has gotten donations for out-of-work staff," they say, "but as the pandemic has progressed, those have dried up. I don't qualify for PUA as a contractor, even though that was the bulk of where my income came from. I was receiving more in unemployment benefits, but it turns out that was actually an IDES mistake—now I get \$70 every two weeks while owing them \$5,000. I'm doing work under the table to barely squeak by and don't want people to know for fear of further retribution from IDES."

Tim Toomey, 36, founded Covert Nine, a full-service digital marketing agency whose bread and butter was brands such as Ruido Fest and Riot Fest, in 2013. After seven years of building the business, he had an office in Lincoln Square with three full-time employees, two full-time contractors, and a client roster (Punk Rock Bowling, Randolph Street Market, Aloha Poke) that must've made for entertaining workdays. He periodically took on paid interns too, then helped them find staff positions at local advertising agencies and continued to work with them as freelancers. He was living his dream with Covert Nine, bringing to his business the same punk-rock ingenuity and passion that had hooked him as a suburban teen in the late 90s, when he'd drive with his friends to shows at the Fireside Bowl. But lack of financial support for his business and its clients have forced him to reduce it to a side gig.

"For me, the PPP loan experience reinforced the whole capitalist-versus-labor story that we've been dealing with since the dark ages," Toomey says. "I couldn't even get Chase to pick up the phone to give me a PPP loan. I've got a line of credit and all of my accounts with Chase, except for my mortgage now. So you do what you can, you ask your network." He wound up in talks with the CEO of a company he'd worked for as a teenager, then with the CEO's son, who referred him to a small bank in Toomey's hometown of Algonquin, Illinois. "So I e-mailed this woman—Karen, the president, the best Karen! A very un-Karen woman. She had me approved for the loan with a check for \$25,000 in my hand the next day. I almost cried. I just couldn't believe it."

But when you have employees waiting on late paychecks and a landlord waiting on back rent, \$25,000 disappears quickly. "It was gone in two months," Toomey says. He got the loan in June, and by August he was forced to lay everyone off. He's still working with clients, but his business has taken such a hit that resuscitating it would basically mean starting from scratch. He has a mortgage and a wife, and they'd like to have kids, so now he's searching for a permanent full-time position. He says some of the high-level marketing jobs for which he's applied demand extremely advanced expertise—and one position that attracted more than 200 applicants would've represented a significant pay and benefits cut from running his own business.

"It's asshole-ish of me to say that," Toomey admits, "because there's people that have no options, that are figuring out how to buy food, and I'm here, you know, pouting about a salary I'm not happy about. But if someone

like me—I got the degree, the social safety net, I'm a white dude who grew up in the suburbs, I've got a resumé, I've got all of these things, and it's still really hard to find my way in these fields. So what does that mean for everyone else?"

Sydney, whose last name I've omitted for her safety, is a Black woman who came to Chicago from Tennessee in 2017 to join a bigger music scene and transition in relative safety. She started playing piano at eight and graduated to guitar and tuba by ten. Now 21, she's sustained her solo project, the Cortex Club, for seven years. Since moving to Chicago, she's also formed the trio Softviolent. Her work history includes various under-the-table odd jobs, gig work such as Postmates, and performing and releasing music.

"People don't want to hire people like me," Sydney says. She hasn't received either stimulus check, and despite needing the money she's unsure whether or how she should press the issue. In 2020, she was hoping to do a national tour and start demanding more money for gigs. She's felt forced to play for little to nothing too many times, just to get her foot in the door. As the art-world joke goes, she's dying from exposure.

In some ways, the pandemic has made playing shows easier for Sydney, because live-streaming is less physically demanding than hauling gear and dealing with the chaos that can come with live music. Plus she gets all the audience tips, without a venue or promoter taking a cut.

In other ways, though, streaming has introduced new challenges. The Internet was already an unimaginably crowded place, but for livestreamers it's become a house party with an infinite number of rooms. Every online event—concerts, book launches, birthday celebrations—has to compete with Twitter, Pornhub, and the rest of the Web, so that despite all the people spending too much time online during the pandemic, it's even harder for musicians to draw a digital crowd. And many artists, especially emerging ones such as Sydney, don't feel prepared to act as the sole or primary promoter for a digital show, despite the pressure to expand their audience in anticipation of live music's return. The pandemic makes it feel even more like success depends on who you already know and who already knows they want to see you.

"Chicago's queer community and DIY community are very cliquey," Sydney says. "All these communities need to take more time actually listening to each other and be more open to new things. And I want the local

"Organizing within my profession has been one of the few things that has kept me going at a time when the government and ruling class have given us a clear message that reopening the economy is more important than people's lives."

—Izzy True, musician and cofounder of Chicago's chapter of the Union of Musicians and Allied Workers

government and communities to step up and actually provide us some support!" Sydney is working as an assistant to a friend who's a sex worker, and she's haunted by the possibility that full-service sex work might be in her future.

"It's dangerous and scary," she says matter-of-factly, referring to the legal and physical risks of the work. "It's too easy to get into trouble. It's not something I'm fully comfortable with, and I have a lot of worries."

Despite everything, Sydney has no desire to leave Chicago. It's a regional beacon for trans resources, and she adores her friends and family here. Still, many have felt forced to move away. Since 2017, Chicago has undergone a net loss of more than 100 residents per day, a loss only mildly accelerated by the pandemic. Lewis doesn't expect to return, and freelance music writer Austin Brown (who's contributed to the *Reader*) moved back in with family in San Diego after being laid off from their day jobs. They didn't see staying in Chicago as worth the expense, given that investing effort in learning a local scene is increasingly unlikely to lead to a sustainable music-writing career.

"When it comes to culture writing, it's all alt-weeklies and underground magazines," Brown says. "There's less opportunity for someone on the ground who's like, 'These guys know these guys, and I went to their studio and talked to them about this project.'"

National outlets don't tend to cover artists or stories with no obvious national appeal, and the local outlets who might support such coverage have been hit especially hard by the pandemic. Chicago has a diverse media landscape, but not every outlet covers music, and those that do have generally cut back—whether through staff layoffs and buyouts, as at the *Tribune*, or through reduced print schedules and freelance budgets, as at the *Reader*. Fewer paying opportunities than ever exist for music writers hoping to develop hyperlocal expertise.

Ironically, it was a local institution—the Chicago Independent Venue League—that gave the city a head start in pushing for the Save Our Stages Act. CIVL formed in late 2018 to push back against Live Nation's integration into the Lincoln Yards development.



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This meant that even before COVID, member businesses such as Metro, the Hideout, and the Empty Bottle had experience working collectively to advocate for themselves and demonstrate to legislators that the loss of independent venues would destroy much of what makes Chicago culturally unique. Not only are they neighborhood economic drivers, but they also have the resources and desire to

spotlight up-and-coming acts that don't move the needle for corporate giants such as Live Nation and Clear Channel.

But CIVL would be the first to admit that SOS doesn't help everyone in music who needs it right now, especially this far into the pandemic. That's why it launched the Staff, Artists, and Venues (SAVE) Emergency Relief Fund at the end of November. (CIVL representatives discuss the project in this week's

installment of Bull Horn, a *Reader* collaboration with Red Bull—you can find it on page 23.) The fund is supported by direct donations, merchandise sales, and the streaming concert series CIVLization, for which local artists such as Half Gringa and ESSO are filmed playing in Chicago venues. SAVE has issued a survey to would-be beneficiaries so it can identify who's hardest hit and develop an equitable distribution model.

"The first round of funding is going to go to furloughed and unemployed staff from Chicago live-music venues," explains Annah Garrett, who's the marketing and publicity coordinator for Metro and its subsidiaries. She's on furlough and collecting unemployment, but she's been volunteering for CIVL since the shutdown. "The second round will go to artists, and the third round will go to venues. So I think it's great that they're prioritizing individuals first. We've raised about \$70,000 so far."

Given that \$25,000 couldn't save Toomey's business, though, \$70,000 won't go very far—not with so many people in live music struggling to pay bills and no end to the shutdown in sight. No one I interviewed wants to risk their safety returning to in-person work now, not with the vaccine rollout still barely off the ground and so much about the next stages of the pandemic still uncertain.

The Trump administration's disastrous pandemic response has musicians here feeling frustration and outrage as they watch European bands begin to plan tours again. In their eyes, the overseas music industry is in a great position to bounce back, thanks largely to those countries' state-subsidized arts sectors and civilized health-care systems. In the U.S., though, more and more people worry that the pandemic is widening the chasm between those who can survive the precarity of the entertainment business and those who don't have the resources—a well-paid partner, generational wealth, whatever—to endure a serious downturn. In the long term, this can lead to high turnover and to attrition of workers with the knowledge and experience to plan tours and run shows smoothly and safely. It also stacks the odds of career success in favor of people who already have money.

This concatenation of institutional failures is inspiring more music workers to organize and call attention to their plight. Their first priority is money to carry them through the crisis. The Union of Musicians and Allied Workers (UMAW) formed in April of last year and has been using the increase in streaming during the pandemic to highlight the fact that Spotify pays an average of half a penny

per stream (and that's a generous estimate). By the winter, Chicago had one of the largest chapters in the country.

Musician Izzy True helped found the local UMAW chapter. "Organizing within my profession has been one of the few things that has kept me going at a time when the government and ruling class have given us a clear message that reopening the economy is more important than people's lives," they say. Though still in its infancy, UMAW Chicago has already raised funds by raffling off swag and gift certificates donated by businesses such as 606 Records and Pretty Cool Ice Cream. It's also organized a livestreamed benefit show at the Hideout to benefit the DIY Chi Mutual Aid Fund.

New York pianist Kathleen Tagg is a member of the Music Workers Alliance (MWA), a similar organization founded in NYC—it's a national group, though its activity so far has been concentrated on the east coast. In December, MWA collected data on how musicians are surviving, so that it'd have numbers to empower organizers and take to legislators. When congress was debating extending the PUA program, MWA compiled and delivered testimonials demonstrating how crucial the assistance has been for music workers. In New York, it teamed up with restaurant workers to fight for COVID-safe outdoor spaces for dining and performing. Tagg hopes to see more such groups emerge and link up.

"We're fed up with the unfair treatment, lack of benefits, unfair contracts, and unfair representation," she says. "In 2017, the arts and culture industry was 4.5 percent of the GDP, a gargantuan \$877 billion sector—something like five times the size of agriculture and twice the size of all transportation and warehousing combined. . . . And people are figuring, there's been a bailout of the arts, but it's really dealing more with institutions or venues or organizations and not people themselves."

All through the pandemic, people have been saying they can't wait for things to get back to normal. But many Chicago music workers see the pandemic as an opportunity to establish a new, better normal. Maybe one with universal health care, so they don't need a certain income or a full-time W-2 job in order to see a doctor. One where musicians are always paid for performances and compensated fairly when their music is streamed. Where the people pouring drinks, taking tickets, and hauling gear are taken care of even when the music stops. Dreaming is the first step. Action is the second. **✎**

@miccoslays

Save the Hampton House

National Virtual Event

Featuring Akua Njeri (widow of Chairman Fred Hampton Sr.) & Chairman Fred Hampton Jr. in conversation with Field Marshal Tur-Ha Ak & Oakland City Councilmember Carroll Fife

Thursday, February 11th
5:30 PT / 7:30 CT / 8:30 ET

Hosted by Community Ready Corps Allies & Accomplices



Photo: Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune

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MUSIC

PICK OF THE WEEK

Casper McFadden's breakcore fuels optimistic dreams



The cover of Casper McFadden's *Stasis (Log)* COURTESY THE ARTIST

CASPER MCFADDEN, *STASIS (LOG)*

Kitty on Fire
caspermcfadden.bandcamp.com/album/stasis-log-2

IN A RECENT VIDEO INTERVIEW with New York City arts and culture site Lumka, Chicago producer Casper McFadden explained that he made his new second album, *Stasis (Log)*, while his landlord renovated his bedroom over the summer. The construction took longer than anticipated, and McFadden spent months stuck on his couch, unable to access the gear he'd left in his room or make music where he was used to doing it. The pandemic had already made him feel like he was trapped in limbo, and the renovations intensified that; fortunately, the music he made during that period never feels stuck in place. McFadden uses a hyperactive blend of intricate, superfast breakcore percussion, luxurious trance synths, and vocal samples to articulate his pent-up anxiety, and his approach somehow makes those sounds feel cathartic and joyful. On "Trippp" he sets a drum 'n' bass loop racing atop a blissful acoustic guitar melody, then cranks up the tempo so that the song becomes positively triumphant—and it's that kind of gesture that makes the stylistic wildness of this album feel less like chaos and more like freedom. —**LEOR GALIL**

BEACH BUNNY, *BLAME GAME*

Mom+Pop
beachbunny.bandcamp.com/album/blame-game

Beach Bunny singer, guitarist, and songwriter Lili Trifilio established herself as a surrogate older sister to a generation of listeners when the band's single "Prom Queen" went viral on TikTok in 2019. The Chicago four-piece are more than a "TikTok band," though. Sure, the teens who dominate the popular video-sharing platform connected with Trifilio's concise melodies and with the feminist themes of "Prom Queen" (it indicts the unrealistic beauty standards applied to young women), but by then Beach Bunny had already come up through the city's DIY rock scene—they'd earned their bona fides by playing years of house shows and self-releasing a string of EPs. Beach Bunny's music has always focused on heartbreak, but on the group's new fifth EP, *Blame Game*, Trifilio expands the emotional palette of her songs to include righteous anger. On lead single "Good Girls (Don't Get Used)," she gleefully talks down to emotionally manipulative, two-timing guys with poor communication skills: "You say you won't but then you do," she repeats on the coda, while drummer Jonathan Alvarado, guitarist Matt Henkels, and bassist Anthony Vaccaro echo the turmoil in the lyrics by cycling through four different grooves. On the title track, a sarcastic retort to anyone who blames women for being sexually harassed, Henkels and Trifilio's power chords seem to grimace as the narrator apologizes that her clothes can't keep other people's hands off her body. The EP's highlight is "Nice Guys," a rebuke of sex-focused men who treat female friendship as a consolation prize, played at the perfect tempo for self-empowered headbanging. *Blame Game* is the first time Trifilio has mentioned sex in her depictions of romance, but it only appears in the past tense, as a nuisance or a betrayal—these are songs by a woman who knows what she's done tolerating. This shift in tone mirrors Trifilio's own evolving attitude. "I can't really see myself resonating with feeling super-insecure in relationships anymore," she recently told *The A.V. Club*. "I feel like—as of late, at least—if people have those red flags, I usually get out of there." Beach Bunny's music already sounds ecstatic when it describes sadness and anger; as the band prepare for their sophomore album, I hope Trifilio will find reason to tell a story with a happy ending. —**JACK RIEDY**

THE BODY, *I'VE SEEN ALL I NEED TO SEE*

Thrill Jockey
thebody.bandcamp.com/album/ive-seen-all-i-need-to-see

Categorizing the doomsday sonic bludgeon wielded by Providence duo the Body over their two-decade reign of terror isn't an easy task. Guitarist and screamer Chip King and drummer Lee Buford slice and dice doom, sludge, noise, and avant-metal into a monolithic, nails-on-chalkboard wall of sound. Buford's hip-hop-mangled thumping and pounding and King's six-feet-under caterwaul could carve out a niche for the duo all on their own, but they only occasionally create their bleak and heavy hellscape alone. The Body thrive on collaboration and community, welcoming guest vocalists such as Chrissy Wolpert (Assembly of Light Choir) and Kristin Hay-



Casper Clausen HANNA STURM

ter (Lingua Ignota) and collaborating in the studio with fellow outsider noiseniks, including Uniform, Full of Hell, and Thou. And for 2019's *Remixed*, the Body handed over some of their crushers to Moor Mother, Moss of Aura, Container, Lingua Ignota, and other soundscapists to put through the grinder. The Body's previous studio album, 2018's *I Have Fought Against It, but I Can't Any Longer*, is strangely uplifting and even somewhat melodic—its damaged electronic beats and orchestral-metal sprawl are highlighted by sharper production than usual for the group. But their new record is its polar opposite: *I've Seen All I Need to See* is a thunderous chunk of unfettered brutality and primal noise, as terrifying as it is revelatory. King and Buford enlist some of the usual suspects as guests (Wolpert on piano, vocalist Ben Eberle of Sandworm), and they also get help from drummer Max Goldman and engineer Seth Manchester, who adds drum programming and keyboards. But this isn't a hybrid effort—it thoroughly and completely embodies the core duo's relentless vision. Opener "A Lament" immediately sets a harsh and hefty tone, driven by the feedback blasts that power all eight of the album's deliberately plodding tracks. Monster drumming anchors the rumbling distortion and squawking of "Tied Up and Locked In," "Eschatological Imperative," and "The Handle/The Blade," while the freewheeling fits and spurts on the unpredictable closer, "Path of Failure," display a touch of free-jazz mettle. On *I've Seen All I Need to See*, the Body mine the darkest of places, trading much of the form and structure of their previous albums for distortion-dripping, amp-busting salvos that can flatten walls with their whiplashing intensity. —BRAD COHAN

CASPER CLAUSEN, *BETTER WAY*

City Slang
casperclausen.bandcamp.com/album/better-way

Danish-born musician Casper Clausen is best known for fronting the long-running Efterklang, which plays exploratory and often ornate electro-

infused indie rock, and for performing with that group's synth-heavy and relatively spontaneous sister project, Liima. This year, for the first time since he began making music as a teen, he's stepped out from a collaborative setting. His debut solo release, *Better Way*, was recorded in his home studio in Lisbon and mixed by Peter Kember (aka Sonic Boom), and it merges indie rock and avant-pop with various electronic fusions and dreamy experiments—Clausen's songs tap into intimate moments in turbulent times and dare to imagine a day to come when hardships and heartbreak will recede into memory. Even "Dark Heart," which hints at a downward spiral into depression, dilutes its sorrow by conjuring dreamy images of flickering celluloid and almost idyllic isolation. Clausen's taste for patchwork styles is evident right from the album's opening track, "Used to Think," which starts with bright, Krautrock-flavored electronic beats that he drops into an easygoing indie-pop melody. The mood never stays stable for long: on "Snow White," where Clausen croons about a lover's suspected betrayal, the disjointed, smoky textures and jazzy swing recall the spooky, tantalizing feel of 90s downtempo, while the uplifting dream pop of "Little Words" feels like it's one ad placement or viral TikTok away from becoming a huge hit. If that happens, Clausen might want to follow up with the steamy, dance-floor-ready "8 Bit Human," which joins pulsing kaleidoscopic pop to electronic experimentalism. He flips the page once again on the closer, "Ocean Wave," a reflective track inspired by his life in Lisbon and the motion of the river outside his studio windows. It drifts along peacefully, with sparkling synths adding touches of light—a fine way to move into the future. —JAMIE LUDWIG

COFFINS, *DEFILEMENTS*

HPGD
hpgd.bandcamp.com/album/defilements

On the new double-disc compilation *Defilements*, long-running Japanese band Coffins solder togeth-



Harry James NICK BROSTE

er a patchwork of death and doom metal from five out-of-print releases that trace their development throughout the 2010s. Coffins spike the collection with covers of iconic American groups such as Death and Buzzoven, faithfully executing each homage, and their original tracks simply swing. Metal can swing as surely as jazz and funk can, and without that crucial element of their sound, Coffins might have ended up just another plodding rock act pummeling worn-out musical tropes. *Defilements* starts with cuts from the 2015 mini LP *Craving to Eternal Slumber*, including its title track, which merges doomy tempos with guttural laments. It's tough to clock the lyrical content of album opener "Hatred Storm," and the muddy recordings of "Under the Stench (Alternative Version)" and "Hell-bringer" make it hard to decipher much of anything besides flying double kick drum and theatrical riffing. Tracks from the 2012 EP *Sewage Sludgecore Treatment*, which earned some stateside acclaim when it came out here in 2013, insinuate a more nefarious death-metal influence, slowing the tempo on a cover of Buzzoven's "Broken" before breaking into an undeniable swing on Eyehategod's "Sister-fucker Part 1" and Grief's "I Hate You." The album finishes out with material from *Live at Asakusa Deathfest 2016*, and by adding the gluey bonus track "Evil Infection," Coffins spotlight their ability to move from thrash to doom and back. They create a through line with guitar solos that pull from NWOBHM and cement the band's purview: everything plangent and tempestuous. —DAVE CANTOR

HARRY JAMES, *BUY THE NUMBERS*

Potions
harryjamesbrenner.bandcamp.com/album/buy-the-numbers

New Jersey native Harry James Brenner found his footing in Chicago's music scene partly by playing in art-rock group Chandeliers; he joined in the mid-aughts as a percussionist, and he's since played keys for them too. The sharply defined clat-

ter of Brenner's drums has kept Chandeliers' mercurial instincts from running away with them, giving even their most ostentatiously experimental escapades an irresistible groove. He's also part of Chandeliers offshoot Songs for Gods, whose 2017 single "Boss" grafts mutant synth blurps and swooning R&B vocals onto a driving, workout-ready rhythm. On Brenner's new solo debut, *Buy the Numbers* (Potions), he leaves behind art-rock and techno and instead draws from soul, jazz, ambient, and R&B, gently but thoroughly reimagining them. He builds tidy instrumentals from sometimes sparse but always comforting piano arrangements, tightened up with percussive latticework. His leisurely, soulful songs have a lived-in feel, and even their negative space has weight to it—which gives an outsize charge to the languid drumming on "Dapper." If I didn't know this album was brand-new, I'd swear it was one of those forgotten LPs that hip-hop producers keep secret while mining for the samples in their best tracks. Brenner's songs often rely on a single mood or beat, but the magnetism they create—most notably on the heart-wrenching "Last Dance" and ruminative "Kid Icarus"—can last for their entire length. —LEOR GALIL

MUKQS, *MY MOST PERSONAL ALBUM TO DATE*

Self-released
mukqs.bandcamp.com/album/my-most-personal-album-to-date

The multifarious outlets of Chicago experimental musician Maxwell Allison include the solo project Mukqs and the improvisational ambient trio Good Willsmith, whose Twitter account he uses to opine about music. His incisive comments on the granular details of his daily listening make it clear he's had the experience of loving a song while hating how it's marketed—which means he knew exactly what he was doing when he named his new solo full-length *My Most Personal Album to Date*. Allison is a prankster—he and fellow Hausu Mountain label cofounder



Nervosa COURTESY THE ARTIST

continued from 37

Doug Kaplan have done truly unspeakable things to chintzy Christmas music—so of course he's not just mocking a PR cliché that's been flogged to death. He actually did make his most personal album to date.

The songs on Allison's new record incorporate incidental recordings made inside his apartment during the pandemic, giving them an unmistakable intimacy. I've seen photos of Allison's cat—that's basically all he posts in his Twitter Fleets—but I'd never heard its meow till I listened to *My Most Personal Album to Date*. I've corresponded with Allison for years and listened to a lot of his work, but I've never heard him as relaxed and unguarded as he sounds on "Baal," where you can eavesdrop on him and his girlfriend casually answering Jeopardy! questions. These everyday moments make up just a tiny fraction of his sonic collages—you're more likely to hear straggly, fingerpicked acoustic guitar ("Story About Nothing"), gentle new age soundscapes ("Northshore"), or gooey samples of 1950s pop ("Splish Splash")—but they might be its most important element. Allison arranges serrated synth sounds into volatile pileups or massages them into serene interludes, changing the shape and tone of his material frequently enough that even its most soothing passages aren't actually relaxing. *My Most Personal Album to Date* hints at stability only in its peeks at Allison's life, which exist in tension with the music's rough edges and disorienting juxtapositions in a way that evokes the intense feelings of pandemic-induced cabin fever. —LEOR GALIL

NERVOSA, PERPETUAL CHAOS

Napalm

nervosa-brazil.bandcamp.com/album/perpetual-chaos

Last spring, the future of Nervosa seemed uncertain. The powerful Brazilian thrash-metal band had changed drummers a few times since forming in 2010, but in April 2020 bassist and vocalist Fernanda Lira and drummer Luana Dametto, two-thirds of the trio on 2018's *Downfall of Mankind*, quit the group. That left just one founding member, guitarist Prika Amaral, to rebuild from scratch. That she did so in such a short time, under pandemic conditions—and emerged this month with the solid, blistering new album *Perpetual Chaos*—is nothing short of heroic. Nervosa's new lineup is multinational: lead vocalist Diva Satanica hails from Spain, drummer Eleni Nota from Greece, and bassist Mia Wallace from Italy. *Perpetual Chaos* was produced by Amaral and Martin Furia at Artesonao Casa de Grabación in Malaga, Spain, a studio they chose in part for its isolated and beautiful location—living communally in such surroundings during the sessions could easily help these four musicians sound as seamless together as if they'd been playing together for years. Opening cut "Venomous" is everything a thrash album should be right out of the gate: tight, fierce, and swaggering. "Blood Eagle" segues from sparse, blood-chilling percussion into thick shuffling riffs and Satanica's savage growl, and it shows off Nota's drumming to great advantage—she's not as flashy here as she is on some of the album's faster tracks, but she's steady and powerful. "Guided by Evil" starts out with an archetypal doom riff before erupting into the classic thrash bait-and-switch of speed and stop, and also gives Amaral's straightforward guitar soloing a moment in the (eclipsed) sun. Though Nervosa are committed to their all-woman lineup, the band invited three men to make cameos on the new album. Singer Erik "A.K." Knutson of Flotsam & Jetsam gives an epic Iron Maiden-ish performance on "Rebel Soul," bassist Marcel "Schmier" Schirmer of Destruction con-



Sleeford Mods JASMIJN SLEGH

tributes vocals to the anarchic pounding of "Genocidal Command," and Brazilian guitarist Guilherme Miranda from Entombed A.D. appears on the boiling "Until the Very End." *Perpetual Chaos* moves assuredly between pure thrash and death metal, and Nervosa prove they can keep the pedal all the way to the floor without succumbing to monotony.

—MONICA KENDRICK

RATS ON RAFTS, EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER 3: THE MIND RUNS A NET OF RABBIT PATHS

Fire

firerecords.com/product/rats-on-rafts-excerpts-from-chapter3

In their 15 years together, Rotterdam postpunk band Rats on Rafts have built a comfortable existence and a decent hometown following, but their new album, *Excerpts From Chapter 3: The Mind Runs a Net of Rabbit Paths*, is a declaration that they're no longer satisfied with mere comfort. On their 2008 EP, *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish*, and their debut full-length, 2011's *The Moon Is Big*, they toed the line between crafting the perfect three-minute punk screed and embracing their more outre influences, especially the example set by fellow Netherlanders the Ex. The songs on *Excerpts* mix musical experimentation and magical-realist storytelling. Singer and guitarist David Fagan, a founding member of Rats on Rafts, told English-language Japanese magazine *Metropolis* that the band's 2018 Japanese tour opening for Franz Ferdinand inspired the album's concept: it colors its loose fictional narrative with moments drawn from the past four or five years of the musicians' lives. The second track, "A Trail of Wind and Fire," features a driving, koto-like pattern created by Fagan and Arnoud Verheul's

guitars. As the beat swells up, Fagan sings, "We will rise again," shaping the beginning of an album-long journey taken by the album's unnamed protagonist. The self-assured swagger of *Excerpts* culminates wonderfully in "Part Two: Crossing the Desert," which reinforces the album's story line with noise samples and clatter reminiscent of the band's previous album, 2015's *Tape Hiss*. Despite those echoes of the past, *Excerpts* proves that Rats on Rafts have the maturity and confidence to leap into new territory. —SALEM COLLO-JULIN

SLEAFORD MODS, SPARE RIBS

Rough Trade

sleefordmods.bandcamp.com/album/spare-ribs

When I first heard Nottingham duo Sleaford Mods, Jason Williamson's unhinged vocal delivery immediately captured my attention. Their minimalist music—which is simply Williamson ranting about working-class struggles over Andrew Fern's sparse, chintzy electronic beats—could appeal to anarcho-punks, hip-hop heads, and Mark E. Smith devotees alike. Williamson is a force: wide-eyed and frothing at the mouth, he breathlessly spills out his profanity-laden, machine-gun rap-ramblings, and onstage he's the punkest, angriest madman you've ever seen perform. A few years ago, I noticed that Sleaford Mods had seemed to soften their approach. Starting on 2017's *English Tapas*, Williamson began delivering his lyrics with a bit more restraint, even permitting himself some harmonizing and catchiness. On their brand-new LP for Rough Trade, *Spare Ribs*, the first thing that hit me was the slower tempos of the songs—I initially felt some disappointment, as I realized that Williamson might never again be the deranged maniac on the mike that he once was. But upon

MUSIC



Layton Wu  COURTESY THE ARTIST

further listening, I'm finding this to be one of the best collections of songs the duo have ever made. Williamson trades fury for focus, letting gloomy melodies and frustrated storytelling channel his power rather than simply spraying it everywhere. Sleaford Mods sound calmer and more collected than they've ever been on *Spare Ribs*, but there's dark energy under that surface—and it suits them well. —**LUCA CIMARUSTI**

THE UNDERFLOW, *INSTANT OPAQUE EVENING*

Blue Chopsticks
theunderflow.bandcamp.com/album/instant-opaque-evening

The Underflow take their name from the Greek record store where guitarist David Grubbs, cornetist Rob Mazurek, and saxophonist Mats Gustafsson played their first trio gig in May 2019. But the connections joining the three musicians were forged in the 1990s, when Grubbs and Mazurek were associated with Chicago's postrock scene and the Sweden-born Gustafsson played here so often that he was considered an honorary Chicagoan. Nowadays they've scattered across two continents (Brooklyn, New York; Marfa, Texas; and Nickelsdorf, Austria), and it takes a European tour to get them on the same stage at the same time. But the breadth of their combined stylistic and instrumental resources is even greater than it was back in the day. Grubbs contributes poetic verses and versatile electric-guitar playing; both Gustafsson and Mazurek have added rough, nonvirtuoso electronics to their respective tool kits of woodwinds and brass. Perhaps the biggest challenge they face is figuring out how best to combine everything they bring together in this group: carefully crafted songs,

wordless cries, high-voltage noise, breathy exhortations, lyrical melodies. On their new second release, *Instant Opaque Evening*, their solution is to use the improvised negotiation of relationships among players and elements as a source of dramatic tension. At any given moment, one musician has another's back while the third proposes a contrasting approach. In an instant, alliances might shift or someone might drop out altogether. Playing out in album-side-length segments, the music evokes the uncertainty of court intrigue and the multifaceted bombardment of a kaleidoscope. —**BILL MEYER**

LAYTON WU, *SUMMERTIME MIXTAPE*

Sunset Music
laytonwoohbill.bandcamp.com/album/summertime-mixtape

Chicago-based, Taiwan-born bedroom-pop auteur Layton Wu blurs boogie, yacht rock, and sun-kissed 60s pop into a calming sound that helps dial back my anxiety when every scrap of news cranks it to "high." He released the luxuriant *Summertime Mixtape* (Sunset Music) four days after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, and since I first listened to it, I've absolutely needed to keep listening to it. Wu sings in a soft-edged but outgoing coo that's both sultry and endearing, accompanied by tight funk bass, nimble percussion, and soothing keys that float in the background or gleam like sunlight off a window. In someone else's hands this might end up musical wallpaper, but Wu's ear for hooks and total commitment to his almost otherworldly retro aesthetic combine to give his songs a magnetic charm. The tender surf guitar and post-lounge electronic drums on "Honey Ginger Tea" help me dream of a summertime getaway—especially welcome now that I'm barely stepping outside. —**LEOR GALIL **

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NEW

Gary Allan 4/8, 7:30 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan
America 10/30, 8 PM, Rialto Square Theatre, Joliet
Jason Bonham's Led Zeppelin Evening 5/1, 7 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan
Anne & Mark Burnell 2/4, 7 PM; 2/11, 7 PM; 2/18, 7 PM; 2/25, 7 PM, livestream at facebook.com/BurnellMusic **FREE**
Chromeo, Ian Isiah 2/5, 8 PM, livestream at bandsintown.com
A.J. Croce 3/18, 7:30 PM; 3/25, 7:30 PM, hosted by City Winery at mandolin.com
Curtis & Loretta 3/21, 7 PM, hosted by Lake County Folk Club at eventcombo.com
Def Leppard, Mötley Crüe, Poison, Joan Jett & the Blackhearts 8/29, 4 PM, Wrigley Field
Dupla Salsera featuring Maelo Ruiz & Willie Gonzalez 6/26, 10 PM, Joe's Live, Rosemont
Melissa Etheridge 10/3, 7:30 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan
Flux Pavilion 2/5, 9 PM, livestream at momenthouse.com
Alasdair Fraser & Natalie Haas 2/19, 7 PM, hosted by Old Town School of Folk Music at mandolin.com
Garcia Peoples 2/18, 8 PM, livestream at showclix.com
Glenn Miller Orchestra 4/30, 7 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan
The Great Unknown featuring Loudon Wainwright III, Suzanne Vega, Steve Forbert, Terre Roche, Christopher Guest, Michael McKean, Harry Shearer, Wesley Stace, Jill Sobule,

Dave Hill 2/23, 6 PM, hosted by City Winery at mandolin.com
Green Day, Fall Out Boy, Weezer 8/15, 5:30 PM, Wrigley Field
Guess Who 5/29, 7:30 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan
David Guetta 2/6, 8 AM, livestream at youtube.com/davidguetta **FREE**
Julia Holter 2/25, 9 PM, hosted by Audiotree at veeps.com
I Am King: The Michael Jackson Experience 3/26, 8 PM, Genesee Theatre, Waukegan
Boney James, Marcus Miller 9/24, 8 PM, the Venue at Horseshoe Casino, Hammond
Mario 2/14, 7 PM, livestream at mandolin.com
John McCutcheon 2/14, 3 PM, hosted by Old Town School of Folk Music at mandolin.com
Mest 2/13, 8 PM, livestream at mest.veeps.com
Amanda Miguel & Diego Verdaguer 8/7, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont
The Millennium Tour featuring Omarion, Bow Wow, Ashanti, Pretty Ricky, Soulja Boy, Lloyd, Ying Yang Twins, Sammie 4/10, 8 PM, Wintrust Arena
Moonrunners Music Festival presents a Valentine's Day Special featuring Mikey Classic & Jayke Orvis, Jesse Wagner, Yes Ma'am, Smelliot, Starving Wolves, Liz & the McGovern Brothers, Gallows Bound, Last False Hope, Local News Legend, CW Ayon, and more 2/12-2/14, 11 AM, livestream at moonrunnersmusicfestival.com **FREE**
Ivan Neville, Jon Cleary Duo 2/16, 8 PM, livestream hosted

by SPACE at mandolin.com
Nielsen Trust 2/24, 8 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv
Niice 2/22, 1 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv **FREE**
Parkway Drive, Hatebreed, Knocked Loose, Fit for a King 9/15, 6:45 PM, Wintrust Arena
Phia Z 2/11, 9:30 PM, livestream at phiaz.veeps.com
Platters, Marvelettes, Classic Drifters 5/14, 7:30 PM, Rialto Square Theatre, Joliet
Reventon Total 2021 featuring Los Askis, Sonido Condor, Grupo Sonador, JRS 5/29, 9 PM, Joe's Live, Rosemont
Lenard Simpson Quartet 2/12, 8 PM, livestream at youtube.com/constellationchicago or facebook.com/jazzinchicago **FREE**
Small Town Titans 2/6, 6 PM, livestream at smalltowntitans.veeps.com
Smile Empty Soul, Hearts & Hand Grenades, Execution Day, A Sunday Fire 5/5, 7 PM, the Forge, Joliet
Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons 10/2, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont
Versa 2/9, 6 PM, livestream at arlenesgroceryveeps.com
Waltzer 2/25, 8 PM, livestream hosted by Empty Bottle at noonchorus.com/empty-bottle-waltzer-tv
Waxahatchee 2/11, 8 PM, livestream at bandsintown.com
Weathers 10/10, 7 PM, Beat Kitchen
John Paul White, Cedric Burnside, Erin Rae 2/14, 8 PM, livestream hosted by SPACE at mandolin.com
Windy City Gospel Celebration featuring Marvin Sapp, Donnie McClurkin, Ricky Dillard, Le'Andria Johnson, Jekalyn Carr 5/9, 7 PM, House of Hope

Jeremy Zucker & Chelsea Cutler 2/10, 8 PM, livestream at momenthouse.com

UPDATED

Acid Mothers Temple & the Melting Paraiso U.F.O. 2/26, 8 PM, Subterranean, canceled
Randy Bachman & Burton Cummings 8/14, 8 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont, rescheduled
BendeLaCreme Is Ready to Be Committed 4/27, 7 PM, Thalia Hall, canceled
Black Pumas, Seratones 4/26-4/27, 9 PM, House of Blues, 4/26 added, 17+
Peabo Bryson, Will Downing 10/2, 8 PM, the Venue at Horseshoe Casino, Hammond, rescheduled
Kenny Chesney, Florida Georgia Line, Old Dominion, Michael Franti & Spearhead 6/26, 5 PM, Soldier Field, venue changed
Chi-Town Blues Festival featuring Pokey, Theodis Ealey, Nellie Travis, Chic Rodgers, Lenny Williams, Bobby Rush 9/18, 8 PM, the Venue at Horseshoe Casino, Hammond, rescheduled
Brandy Clark, Kelsey Waldon 4/10, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, postponed
Cowboy Mouth 11/20, 8:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled
Dabin, Last Heroes, Trivecta 2/13, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, postponed, 18+
The Dip 3/25, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, canceled
Driver Era, Wrecks 11/17, 7:30 PM, the Vic, rescheduled
Ferris & Sylvester 9/18, 7:30 PM, Martyrs', rescheduled
Sue Foley 10/25, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled
Fuzz 4/19/2022, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, rescheduled, 17+
Halsey 6/26, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park, canceled
John Moreland, S.G. Goodman 4/24, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, canceled
Sinead O'Connor 8/18-8/21, 8 PM, City Winery, 8/21 sold out
Pokey LaFarge, Esther Rose 2/19, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, canceled
Maggie Rose, Them Vibes 2/13, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, postponed
Todd Rundgren 2/14; 2/16-2/20; 2/22-2/23; 2/25-2/26; 2/28-3/1; 3/3-3/4; 3/6-3/7; 3/9-3/10; 3/12-3/13; 3/15-3/16; 3/18-3/19; 3/21-3/22, limited capacity in-person tapings at a Chicago location for

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livestream broadcast, location and showtime revealed to ticket holders, 2/14 and 2/26 sold out
Chris Smither 4/14/2022, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, rescheduled
Sunshine Boys, Bobbleheads 3/26, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, canceled
24-7 Spyz, Sweet Diesel Jenkins, Pipe 4/8, 7:30 PM, Reggies' Music Joint, canceled
Dar Williams 1/1/2022, 7 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, rescheduled

UPCOMING

Paul Bedal Quartet 2/20, 8 PM, livestream at youtube.com/constellationchicago **FREE**
Besnard Lakes 2/5, 6 PM; 3/6, 6 PM; 4/3, 6 PM, livestream hosted by Subterranean at noonchorus.com
Jenny & Robin Bienemann 2/21, 7 PM, livestream hosted by Lake County Folk Club at eventcombo.com
Corky Siegel's Chamber Blues Extravaganza featuring Ernie Watts, Marcella Detroit, Lynne Jordan, Cantor Pavel Roytman, Frank Orrall, and Toronzo Cannon 3/6, 7 PM, livestream at citywinery.com **FREE**
Cradle of Filth 2/20, 4 PM, livestream at cradleoffilth.veeps.com
Kurt Elling 2/13, 8 PM, livestream hosted by Epiphany Center for the Arts at mandolin.com
Hlday Magik 2/13, 7 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com/hideout
Holly 2/10, 4 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv **FREE**
Kara Jackson 2/18, 1 PM, livestream at audiotree.tv **FREE**
Michael McDonald 2/12, 8 PM, livestream at mandolin.com
Terrance Simien & the Zydeco Experience with Marcella Simien 2/13, 7:30 PM, livestream hosted by FitzGerald's at mandolin.com
A Very Special Valentine's Day: A benefit for Chicago Community Jail Support featuring Ohmme, Monogamy, Nnamdi, Bone Reader, Meg Indurti, Grace Freud, A.J. Marroquin, Julia Shiplett, and more 2/11, 7 PM, livestream at noonchorus.com/hideout



GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

SINCE 2008, photo crew **GlitterGuts** have been key documenters of Chicago's nightlife scene. They've brought their cameras to Zine Fest, Girls Rock! Chicago events, nearly all of Beauty Bar's happenings, and practically every show by turbocharged cabaret collective the Fly Honeys—if a GlitterGuts photographer had a booth set up, you knew you were at a great party. The pandemic's destruction of nightlife has of course hurt GlitterGuts too—for the past 11 months, they've relied on portraits and the occasional outdoor event. Last month, founders **Sarah Joyce** and **Eric Strom** launched a **Patreon** to help sustain the company and perhaps fund more of their nontraditional creative work. Subscribers can receive Strom's detailed, funny Chicago party histories and high-res photos from the GlitterGuts archives. "It gives us a space to experiment with some writing and see where that goes," Joyce says. "Maybe sharing work in progress, or just different projects. Patreon is hopefully a space to do that."

Gossip Wolf has been intrigued by artist and musician **Hali Palombo** since seeing her haunting installation "Grand Detour" last summer—it mixes sparse field recordings with surveillance-style video of empty midwestern retail and industrial locations. Last week, she released the cassette **Cylinder Loops**, which creates a wonderfully blurry, dislocated ambience by collaging crackly recordings more than a century old from the University of California at Santa Barbara's Cylinder Audio Archive. It's available digitally and as a limited-edition tape via Bandcamp.

Local singer **Queen Mars** has been on a tear lately, releasing standout R&B singles with beguiling videos and earworm melodies tinged with alt-pop. Her hot streak includes "Bltch," "Queen of Hearts," and now **"Boys Like You,"** a slow burner about emotionally closeted men who want "a good girl, to fuck it up." It's the first cut from her EP **Trust Issues**, due Friday, April 9. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

WOLF BY KETH HERZIK



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CHICAGOANS OF NOTE

CaSera Heining, producer at WGN Radio and DJ Ca\$h Era

"For a couple months, I was just DJing for tips. Luckily the community that I have around me, they were pouring into me as much as I give out to them."

As told to LEOR GALIL

CaSera "DJ Ca\$h Era" Heining, 25, is a producer at WGN Radio and runs her own mobile DJ company. She's also the official DJ for Young Chicago Authors' annual Louder Than a Bomb youth poetry festival and competition.

When I hit Columbia, my freshman year—that was fall of 2013—I took a DJ course. It was called Club DJ 1, and I took it because I needed to hit 16 credit hours. My guidance counselor was like, "Just take it, it's an easy A and it's in your building." I was like, "Yeah, 'cause I don't want to have to leave during the wintertime anyway—let's do it."

I excelled better than I thought I would. My professor was DJ I.N.C., and he was working with Louder Than a Bomb. So when the semester ended, he reached out to me at the beginning of January and was like, "Hey, would you be down to DJ some poetry events on campus

and get paid to do it?" I'm like, "Hell yeah—I only gotta walk from building to building, and I can make some money? Let's do it." I literally finished the class in December, and then February 2014, I started DJing for Louder Than a Bomb.

I always thought of that as a side job; my main focus was always radio. I first wanted to be on-air at a radio station, and then that energy switched my junior year, 'cause I kept hearing horror stories—like on-air talent can get let go at the drop of a dime for nothing. I was just like, "I want something with a bit more job stability." So I started looking at the production side of radio—sales, music programming, music directing. By my senior year, I was looking at DJing way more seriously because I was full-time at that point.

I didn't have a plan; it all kind of just came to me. I was doing one of the ballots for LTAB,

and this girl walked up and asked me if I would DJ her birthday party. And I agreed. As soon as I said yes, I text my mom, like, "Hey, I have to buy equipment." I had no speakers—all I had was my laptop and a small controller, like the cheapest one you could buy from Serato and Pioneer.

My mom, she was always in my ear, like, "OK, you need to go online, and you're gonna find a set of speakers. You're gonna use this credit card that we gave you—that way you can build up your credit. And then make sure that you make payments to pay that back." The very first pair of speakers that I ever bought, they were a pair of JBLs—I still have them and use them to this day. Bought them back in 2014. Then after that, my mom came back and was like, "OK, you need business cards." I had no logo at the time; all it said was my name, my e-mail, and my phone number. It was a very stock design from Vistaprint, and I started using those business cards.

YCA had me DJ their open-mike series, WordPlay, every Tuesday that summer, for a month or two. When I got back to Columbia for my second year, some of the people on campus started learning that I was a DJ, so then different orgs would book me. Northwestern University caught wind of it, and then my junior and senior years I was going out to Evanston to DJ their football and basketball games. All the while, I was still working a job off campus 'cause I commuted.

My first job was at Culver's—I stayed there until sophomore-ish year, going into junior

year, then I left and went to AMC Theatres. When Northwestern picked me up, I went to my manager—months in advance—like, "Hey, I got this super cool job DJing for Northwestern. I'll need certain dates off on the weekends. Can you give them to me?" He looked me dead in my eye and he was like, "No, we can't do that, 'cause you already only work Friday, Saturday, Sunday for us." As soon as he said that, I took a piece of receipt paper and said, "Well then, I quit. I'm putting in my two weeks now."

After graduation I had the scare of no job reaching back out. I applied to everywhere in Chicago and nothing was coming back, so I started looking at other cities. Kevin Coval sat me down, and he was like, "Yo, we are not losing you. We need you here—what do you want to do?" He helped me to meet the right people to get me a job at WGN Radio.

August, September of 2017, I was just getting booked a lot. It just kept growing from there, and it got to a point where I looked at my funds and I'm like, "Yeah, I make all of my money DJing right now." WGN is cool, and I still get paid from that, but the bulk of my income is DJing. I just started putting way more energy on that.

I didn't really look at myself as a full-time DJ until mid-2017. I was still so in my head about wanting to work in radio or television. I was so in my head about what my degree was actually in. It took a while for me to actually look at myself as a full-time DJ. I feel like everyone else around me saw it before I did.

When the pandemic hit, I lost all of my gigs in two or three days. I had to wait for all the e-mail cancellations. Louder Than a Bomb went fully virtual—they had me hop on and DJ, so I had to master Zoom in a matter of a day or two. That helped me in the long run, 'cause then other orgs started to book me. I even did a New Year's party via Zoom, so that was different.

I started looking at Twitch—for a couple months, I was just DJing for tips. Luckily the community that I have around me, they were pouring into me as much as I give out to them. It was beautiful, and I definitely cried some nights. Like, that's what helped me—the people that I DJ for all the time, they came back to pay it forward. And they don't have to, 'cause we're all in a pandemic. **A**

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OPINION

SAVAGE LOVE

The pandemic sex recession is upon us

Too stressed, overworked, and overwhelmed to get it on

By **DAN SAVAGE**

Q: I'm a 30-year-old straight woman in a three-year relationship with my live-in partner, who is also 30. I love him and he loves me and he wants to make a life with me. However, in this pandemic, the stress is so great that I have lost all desire to have sex. I don't want anyone touching me right now, not even myself. I feel like I'm in survival mode. I lost the career I love and I'm working four different jobs to make up for it. I have also been coming to terms in therapy with a sexual trauma

I suffered, which is making me want to be touched even less. He's been extremely patient, and says that we can work through it, but I'm really worried that this is the death knell for our relationship. I'm really trying to figure out ways to get myself back in good working order, Dan, but honestly I'm just trying to survive every day right now. Help? —**WITTY ACRONYM HERE**

A: First, you're not alone. So many people have seen their libidos tank in response

to the overlapping stresses of lockdowns and job losses that sex researchers are talking about (and documenting) a "pandemic sex recession."

So what can you do? You have a long, hard slog in front of you, personally and professionally, and you need to carve out enough time and space for yourself to get through this. And to do that you're not just gonna need to reset your partner's expectations for the duration of the pandemic and/or until you're back on your

feet again professionally and emotionally, you're going to need to take his yes for an answer. If he tells you he's willing to tough/rub it out until you're less stressed out, less overworked, and less overwhelmed, and he's not being passive aggressive about your lack of desire, then you should take him at his word. If he's not trying to make you feel bad about the sex you aren't having right now, WAH, don't make yourself feel bad about it.

There's no guarantee your relationship will survive this (the pandemic), that (your crushing workload), or the other thing (the trauma you're working through in therapy). Any one of those things or some other thing could wind up being the death knell for your relationship. But the only way to find out if your desire for your partner will kick back into gear post-pandemic, post-career-crisis, and post-coming-to-terms-with-past-sexual-trauma is to hang in there, WAH, and reassess once you're past those posts. Will you two still be together once you're out of survival mode? Survive and find out. Good luck.

Q: I'm a 34-year-old straight woman dating a 32-year-old straight man. When we first met, we had both recently relocated to our hometown and were living with our parents. When we first started dating, things were great, however, the sex wasn't mind-blowing. Foreplay was limited and he always jumped out of bed afterward. I thought this was probably due to the fact that while we had privacy, we were having sex at my parent's house which isn't particularly sexy. We finally moved in together nine months ago and now it feels like we've been married for decades. He almost always turns my sexual advances down. And



JOE NEWTON

when we do have sex, it lasts about five minutes and I do all of the work and get ZERO satisfaction out of it. He will hold my hand on the couch but if I ask him to cuddle he acts like I am asking for a huge favor. I've explained to him I need to feel wanted and to have some kind of intimacy in this relationship. And yet, despite the multiple conversations about how sexually, physically, and emotionally unsatisfied I am, he has put in little effort. Otherwise, our relationship is great. We have fun together, I love him, I want to be with him, and we've talked about marriage and kids, but I also can't live this way for the rest of my life. What can I expect from a man who is emotionally and physically unavailable? —**INTIMATE NEEDS THAT INVOLVE MAKING A TEAM EFFORT**

A: A lifetime of frustration.

You wanna make the sex and physical intimacy work because so much else is working—it sounds like pretty much everything else is working—but you can't make the sex and intimacy work if he's not willing to work on it. And even if he was willing to work on it, INTIMATE, even if he

was willing to make an effort sexually, there's no guarantee that working on it will actually work. Some couples work on this shit for decades and get nowhere. Opening the relationship up might make it possible for you to have him and sexual satisfaction too—by getting sexual satisfaction elsewhere—but opening up a relationship also requires effort, INTIMATE, and effort clearly isn't his thing. DTMFA.

Q: My fiancé and I (both male) have been together for six years. I am fully out but he is only out to his close friends and his mom. The rest of his family doesn't know. His coworkers don't know. I've met his family and coworkers who don't know and played the "friend" and "roommate" and it kills me but he still won't budge. It's also not like homosexuality is taboo in his family. He has a gay uncle and his uncle and his partner are invited to family holidays and welcomed with open arms. Is it even worth continuing this relationship? —**FEELING INSECURE ABOUT NEEDLESSLY CLOSETED ENGAGEMENT**

A: Your fiancé has to choose: he can have you or he can have his closet but he can't have both. It's not about telling him what to do, FIANCE, it's about setting boundaries around what you're willing to do. And for the last six years you let him drag you back into the closet—you were willing to pretend to be his friend or his roommate—but you're not willing to do that anymore. If he wants to have a life with you, he can choose to come out. If he's not willing to come out, he'll have to learn to live without you. **A**

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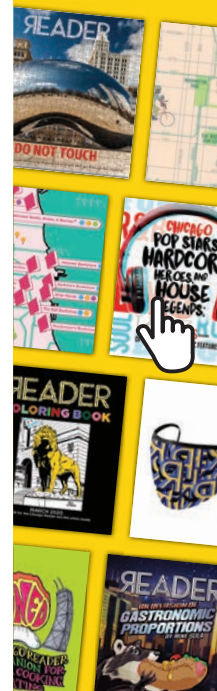
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COURTESY KATHARINE SOLHEIM

Fast friends Katharine Solheim and Mandy Medley originally met at Unabridged Bookstore in Lakeview, where they daydreamed about running a shop of their very own. The opportunity came about in 2019, when Aaron Lippelt and Mary Gibbons, founders of the three-year-old Pilsen Community Books, put the bookstore up for sale. Solheim and Medley partnered with Thomas Flynn, another local bookseller interested in PCB, to take over what they envisioned as a political project and experiment. PCB worker Manuel Morales y Mendez joined the trio, on a track toward partial ownership, when they started on March 1, 2020, just 15 days before COVID would prompt their switch to exclusively curbside pickup and home delivery. Though financial limitations meant Medley and Solheim had to part ways with their colleagues, they remain committed to a worker owned and operated model.

When asked about the importance of their shop and Chicago's independent bookstores, the PCB team actually cited a 1993 *Chicago Reader* piece titled "Everybody's Watching Chicago's Book Wars." It acknowledges the city of Chicago's education and sophistication, but also its grit, and grit feels like the key for PCB: "We think it's that grit that has helped Chicago's independent bookstores survive the onslaught of big box stores, then Amazon's terrible business practices and market dominance, and multiple recessions. At the end of the day, Chicago's literary-minded citizens want to support actual brick and mortar bookstores run by passionate booksellers who are deeply invested in their communities and give back."

And despite the limitations of the pandemic, the PCB team does give back.

"We're pretty outspoken about our politics on social media, and we work hard to ensure they are reflected in the books we choose to carry and promote," the owners said proudly. The team regularly amplifies and participates in marches, mutual aid efforts, and protests, even matching Minnesota Freedom Fund donations out of personal pockets last summer. PCB partnered with Liberation Library to provide incarcerated youth with books; they relaunched the Pilsen Reads program with a raffle in order to distribute free books through the Pilsen Food Pantry; and they regularly host literary and political virtual events, all of which can be found on YouTube, and many of which have served as fundraisers for local organizations like Chicago Abortion Fund and Brave Space Alliance.

"We're constantly grappling with what it means to try and live our politics under capitalism as small business owners, and we're grateful for the support of our local community here in Pilsen and our literary community all over the country as we try to figure it out each and every day," they noted. "We've always thought of reading not as political action itself, but as a tool to inform action."

This yearlong partnership with
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The Chicago Reader BOOK CLUB

Author Talk
Feb. 25, 2021



Eve Ewing
Author

Dr. Eve L. Ewing is a sociologist of education and a writer from Chicago. She is the award-winning author of the poetry collections *Electric Arches* and *1919* and the nonfiction work *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side*. She is the co-author (with Nate Marshall) of the play *No Blue Memories: The Life of Gwendolyn Brooks*. She also currently writes the *Champions* series for Marvel Comics and previously wrote the acclaimed *Ironheart* series, as well as other projects. Ewing is an assistant professor at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration. Her work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, and many other venues. Her first book for young readers, *Maya and the Robot*, is forthcoming in July 2021.



Maudlyne Ihejirika
Moderator

Maudlyne Ihejirika is an award-winning *Chicago Sun-Times* urban affairs columnist with 30 years of experience in journalism, public relations, and government.

Building on a B.A. in journalism from the University of Iowa and an M.S.J. from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Ihejirika's work in state government and media has resulted in countless achievements, including serving as president for both the National Association of Black Journalists Chicago Chapter and the Chicago Journalists Association; ranking one of "The 25 Most Powerful Women In Chicago Journalism" in 2019; publishing her book *Escape From Nigeria: A Memoir of Faith, Love and War*; and launching Ihejirika Media & Communications Group to manage media for members of U.S. Congress, Illinois Legislature, and City Council. Her awards include the Studs Terkel Award, national and local awards from the Society of Professional Journalists

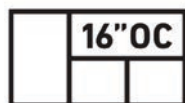
and National Association of Black Journalists, and several civic awards, including the Chicago Defender Woman of Excellence and African Festival of the Arts Community Servant Award. Ihejirika is a frequent guest contributor on PBS-TV's "Chicago Tonight: Week In Review" and FOX-32's "Good Day Chicago," and she has appeared as a political analyst on CNN, TV One, ABC, CBS, NPR, WBEZ, WVON, and V103.

She currently pens the *Sun-Times* "Chicago Chronicles," long-form columns offering diverse narratives and untold stories of inspiring people, places, organizations, and issues in Black and Brown communities. Follow her at @maudlynei on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

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Mikki Kendall

*Hood Feminism:
Notes From the
Women That a
Movement Forgot*
Book Club Month:
October 20
Author Talk:
10/22/2020

Sonali Dev

*Recipe for
Persuasion*
November 20
11/19/2020

Riva Lehrer

Golem Girl
December 20
12/17/2020

Emil Ferris

*My Favorite
Thing Is Monsters*
January 21
1/28/2021

Eve Ewing

1919
February 21
2/25/2021

Nnedi Okorafor

Remote Control
March 21
3/25/2021

Natalie Moore

The South Side
April 21
4/22/2021

Rebecca Makkai

*The Great
Believers*
May 21
5/27/2021

Fatimah Asghar

*If They Come for
Us*
June 21
6/24/2021

Kayla Ancrum

Darling
July 21
7/22/2021

Jessica Hopper

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Precious Brady-Davis

*I Have Always
Been Me: A
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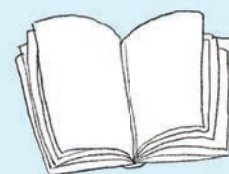
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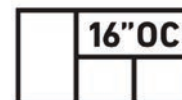
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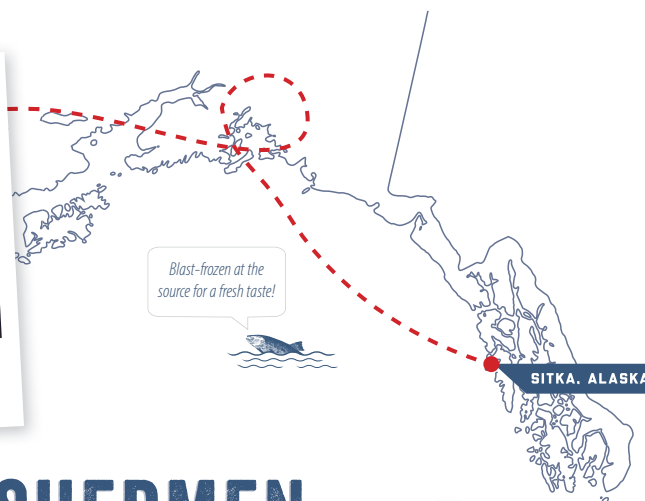
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